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The Qur'anic Jesus: A Study of Parallels with Non-Biblical Texts

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by

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This study examines which texts and religious communities existed that could well have contributed to Muhammad’s understanding of Jesus. The most important finding is that the Qur’anic verses mentioning Jesus’ birth, certain miracles, and his crucifixion bear close resemblance to sectarian texts dating as early as the second century. Accordingly, the idea that such verses from the Qur’an involving Jesus are original productions of the seventh century should be reconsidered.

The research covers a series of significant topics that support these findings. They include theological conflicts in third century Arabia; the interaction between Christian monks, Saracens, Arabs, and Ishmaelites; sectarian texts in and near Arabia that likely formed a model for the Qur’anic Jesus; initial reactions to Muhammad; and an overall analysis of the verses in the Qur’an that mention Jesus.

This study validates the conclusion that certain non-biblical, Jesus-based narratives remained current in and near Arabia and were accessible to Muhammad. As a result, Muhammad presented a Jesus considered unique to his personal religious experiences. This Jesus, however, appears to have developed from non-biblical, pre-Islamic texts and the groups who kept these stories alive.

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ΠΑΝΤΑ ΙΣΧΥΩ ΕΝ ΤΩ ΕΝΔΥΝΑΜΟΥΝΤΙ ΜΕ.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AJA	American Journal of Archaeology
BASOR	Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research
BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
PMLA	Publication of the Modern Language Association of America

INTRODUCTION

Jesus of Nazareth holds a very special place for all Muslims. He is mentioned over thirty times in the Qur'an and is called Messiah, Spirit of God, and a prophet of God who performed miracles and raised the dead with God's permission.[1] It is also believed that Jesus will come at the end times to judge humanity and usher in a Muslim-era. Since the traditional belief is that the Qur'an was the collection of Muhammad's revelations, it is fair to ask what specific texts and religious communities existed that were available to him and may have influenced his understanding of Jesus.

This study will largely rely on the primary sources that detail the specific episodes and personalities that contributed to Muhammad's understanding of Jesus. In addition, there are sources that address the various texts and religious communities that can be identified as possible influences on Muhammad.

[1] For these passages in the Qur'an, see Appendix.

Christian Sources

Christian sources range from the account of Paul's trip to Arabia[2] to sources which recorded the reactions to Muhammad's initial religious movement. Paul went to Arabia immediately following his conversion, but his activities there were not recorded. He did, however, prepare for his future mission work. In the second century Pantaenus of Alexandria traveled to modern south Arabia and found a Christian society that possessed a Hebrew version of *The Gospel of Matthew* that, according to Eusebius, had been left by the apostle Bartholomew.[3] Origen dealt with growing

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[2] A starting point to classify Arabia and Arabs is the *Geography* of Strabo (64 BCE-24 CE): "And after Mesopotamia (are the countries) this side of the Euphrates. And these are the whole of Arabia Felix, being bounded by the whole of the Arabian Gulf and the Persian Gulf, and the whole peoples are occupied by the tent dwellers and the tribal chieftains that reach to the Euphrates and Syria. Then the peoples across from the Arabian Gulf as far as the Nile are the Ethiopians and the Arabs and the Egyptians who live next to them." Strabo, *Geography*, vol. 1, trans. Horace Leonard Jones (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917), 2:5:32, Jones, 499. Strabo further describes Arabia: "And above Judea and Coele-Syria and as far as Babylonia and the river valley of the Euphrates to the south is the whole of Arabia." Strabo continues: "And the parts that follow after Mesopotamia as far as Coele-Syria, the part near the river and Mesopotamia, is occupied by the Scenitae [tent-dweller] Arabs." Strabo, *Geography*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), vol. 7, 16:3:1, Jones, 301. Further descriptions add: "Above these (the tribes mentioned earlier) is Arabia Felix, extending twelve thousand stadia to the south as far as the Atlantic high sea. And the first ones who occupy this area after the Syrians and Judeans are tillers of the earth...and this area is occupied the tent dwelling Arabs and camel herders." Strabo, *Geography*, vol. 7, 16:4:2, Jones, 309. Further descriptions of Arabia will be provided in Chapter 1 on Paul, and in Chapter 4 on the Arabian groups in the *Panarion*.

[3] For these references to Bartholomew see Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 1, trans. Kirsopp Lake (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 5:10:2-3, Lake, 462; Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, XXXVI, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* vol. 3, trans. Ernest Cushing

dissenting movements during his three trips to Arabia and was even called to explain his faith to the local governor.[4] His primary opponent was Bishop Beryllus of Bostra, whose views were later modified by Paul of Samosata and others, who deemphasized the divinity of Jesus. In addition, Origen wrote to advise the Roman emperor on Arabian theological dissent and dealt with the Elchasaites in Arabia.

An analysis of the interaction among Christian monks, Saracens, Arabs, and Ishmaelites reveals a treasure trove of details. Sources include *The Life of Shenoute*,[5] *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*,[6] *A History of the Monks of Syria*,[7]

Richardson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 370. Muslims also accept the tradition that Bartholomew came to Arabia, in particular the Hijaz, the Red Sea side of Arabia that includes Mecca and Medina. The earliest biography of Muhammad mentions where, according to later Muslim understanding, the followers of Jesus went to spread the gospel: "Those men who Jesus son of Mary sent, both disciples and those who came after them, in the land were: Peter the disciple and Paul with him (Paul belonged to the followers, was not a disciple) to Rome; Andrew and Matthew to the land of the cannibals; Thomas to the land of Babel which is in the land of the east; Philip to Carthage which is in Africa; John to Ephesus the city of the young men of the cave; James to Jerusalem which is Aelia the city of the sanctuary; Bartholomew to Arabia which is the land of the Hijaz; Simon to the land of the Berbers; Judah was not one of the disciples was put in the place of Judas;" see Ibn Hisham, *The Life of Muhammad: A translation of Ishaq's Rasul Allah*, trans. A. Guillaume (Karachi: Oxford University Press, Pakistan Branch, 1955), *Messengers Sent to the Various Kingdoms*, 972, Guillaume, 653.

[4] This account is covered in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 2, trans. J.E.L. Oulton (London: William Heinemann, 1962), 6:19:15, Oulton, 62.

[5] Besa, *The Life of Shenoute*, trans., David Bell (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1983).

[6] Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine,* trans. R.M Price (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1991).

[7] Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, trans. R.M. Price (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1985).

The Life of Simeon Stylites,[8] the *Lausiac History*[9] and sections of the histories of Socrates and Sozomen. Arabs often sought out monks for healings and blessings and from these contacts a strong bond developed between monks and local Arabs. Some of these Arabs even became prominent members of the church. A detailed account reveals the interaction between a Saracen Queen Mauia and an ascetic named Moses.

In his *Panarion*, Epiphanius of Salamis lists and details dozens of groups in and near Arabia that used certain non-Biblical texts who were led by charismatic prophets. He provides details on the characteristics of the founders of these groups and the texts that they used and describes what they believed regarding Jesus. Although Muhammad is known to have had personal contacts and relationships with Christians,[10] the Qur'an goes to great lengths to defend the idea that his revelations were solely from God and that there were no human intermediaries.

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[8] "The Life of Simeon Stylites: A Translation of the Syriac Text in Bedjan's Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum, vol. IV," trans. Frederick Lent, *JAOS* 35 (1915):103-198.

[9] Palladius, *The Lausiac History*, trans. Robert T. Meyer (London: Longman's, Green and Co., 1965).

[10] These relationships are discussed below in chapter 5.

Muslim Sources

The principal biography of Muhammad, *The Life of Muhammad,* remains the definitive source on Muhammad's life and is referred to frequently in this study. The surviving version is Ibn Hisham's (d.834) revised edition of Ibn Ishaq's (d.767) work on Muhammad's life.[11] Although Ibn Hisham's updated version contains omissions and interpolations that fit the socio-religious sentiments of the period, it remains an essential primary source that derives from a strong oral tradition.[12] A lack of historical specifics in the Qur'an prompted the editors of the *Life* to

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[11] For the possible influence of Coptic hagiographical texts on the *Life of Muhammad*, see Gordon D. Newby, "An Example of Coptic Literary Influence on Ibn Ishaq's Sirah," *JNES* 31 no. 1 (Jan., 1972): 22-28.

[12] See Michael Cook, *Muhammad* (Oxford: University Press, 1996), 62. This is a brief but critical look at the sources of Muhammad's life. Joseph Schacht argues that classical Muslim literature on Muhammad remains laden with forged tales that inundated formative Muslim centuries. These sources and traditions came centuries after Muhammad and displayed the need to go farther and farther back in time until the tradition was attributed to Muhammad himself; see Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: University Press, 1950), 4-5. In addition, French Arabic scholar Régis Blachére argued that the Qur'an presents only fragments of Muhammad's life, while the biographical tradition tries to explain and complete the ambiguities in the Qur'an. Moreover, any history on the period before Muhammad's prophetic call in 610 leads one down the road of a hagiography that attempts to invent a chronology of Muhammad's life. Régis Blachére, *Le Probléme de Mahomet: Essai de biographie critique du fondateur de l'Islam* (Paris, 1952), 11-15. Patricia Crone points out that the formation of the Muslim tradition was an "explosion" and that the first compilers were simply collectors who amassed as much legendary debris as possible to construct this tradition. Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: University Press, 1980), 13. Available Western works that address sections of the *Life of Muhammad* include W. M. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953); *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956); and *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961. Also see notes 33-35 below on more recent studies.

embrace literary tools and styles that supported Muhammad's role as God's final prophet and described specific episodes not included in the Qur'an. The core literary aim of the *Life of Muhammad*, then, was to develop an historical context that paralleled and explained what was found in the Qur'an.

In the introduction of his translation of the *Life of Muhammad,* Alfred Guillaume[13] addresses the personal and political jealousies that affected the transmission and compilation of the text. For example, Ibn Ishaq ran into problems with Malik Ibn Anas, a renowned Muslim sheikh, who criticized Ibn Ishaq's dependency on Medinan Jews for their accounts of Muhammad's early life in Medina. This conflict led Ibn Anas and the community of Medina to question Ishaq's orthodoxy. Ibn Ishaq was also criticized for his sympathies with the cause of Ali ibn Abi Talib because he relied heavily in his *Life* on information that he gained from Fatima, wife of Ali.[14] Ibn Ishaq was also criticized over his view that man had free will and some saw his list of *isnads* (chains of oral authorities) as defective or unreliable. Ibn Ishaq, however, maintained that what he had

[13] *The Life of Muhammad, Introduction,* xiii-xvii.
[14] See *Life of Muhammad, Introduction*, xiii. For a critical look at the legal texts of Malik ibn Anas see Malik ibn Anas, *Al Muwatta of Imam Malik ibn Anas: The First Formulation of Islamic Law*, trans. Aisha Abdurrahman Bewley (Medina: 2005). Guillaume remained unsure if these problems in Medina forced Ishaq to leave or if he left voluntarily.

recorded was truthful and admitted the questionable nature of any source that he felt was in doubt.

According to Guillaume, Ibn Ishaq relied on the written notes of about a dozen predecessors.[15] These included Al Awwam (d.716), a cousin of Muhammad, whom Ibn Ishaq called the father of Muslim history; Wahb Ibn Munabbih, (d.732) a Persian from Yemen who was familiar with Jewish and Christian scriptures; Al-Ansari (d.c.742), who had written a collection of accounts of Muhammad's earliest campaigns; and Al Zuhri (d.c.746), who worked for Caliph Abd Al Malik (r.685-705). Al Zuhri is said to have interrogated anyone and everyone about anything that pertained to the life of Muhammad.

Guillaume states that even though the Medinan phase of Muhammad's career is well documented, the sections in the *Life* that detailed the period from Muhammad's birth up to his initial military campaigns are at best a collection of hazy memories. He even argues that there were no real attempts to maintain any accuracy regarding the Meccan phase of Muhammad's life.[16] As a result, he states that "the story of those years is filled out with legends and stories of miraculous events which inevitably undermine the modern

[15] For the descriptions of these men and their works, see *Life of Muhammad*, *Introduction*, xiv-xvi.
[16] Ibid., xviii, xix.

reader's confidence in the history of this period as a whole."[17] In addition, Guillaume states, "The Near East has produced an enormous number of books on the miracles of saints and holy men. and it would be strange indeed if Islam had not followed in the footsteps of its predecessors in glorifying the achievements of its great leader at the expense of his human greatness."[18] These points, however, should not lessen the importance of the *Life of Muhammad* as a primary source.

The revisions of the *Life* came from its editor, Ibn Hisham, from Himyar in south Arabia. Because he was a well-known philologist, Ibn Hisham heavily edited the poetry within the *Life* and argued that most, if not all, of this poetry should be rejected because of the amount of unusual vocabulary in it. Ibn Hisham even corrected Ibn Ishaq's errors and assigned sections to writers who he believed were their *real* authors.[19]

In his works on Islam, John Wansbrough admits that there is no foolproof method to determine the authenticity of the *Life of Muhammad*, but he suggests that looking first

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[17] Whenever Ibn Ishaq encountered a questionable account, or more than one tradition on a particular topic, he often used the phrase "God knows best," or "Only God knows the truth." This, Guillaume said, demonstrated the thoroughness of Ishaq's assessment of the various traditions he collected.

[18] *Life of Muhammad*, *Introduction*, xxiii.

[19] Guillaume has little to say on Ibn Hisham, and focused more on Ibn Ishaq.

at the context of the Qur'an may help.[20] However, even this approach remains difficult because much of Muslim literature, like the canonical Christian Gospels, can be considered salvation history. This particular type of history was created by the faithful to express religious convictions and was a literary form that required its own specific historical mindset. This brand of history makes it difficult at times for the historian to extract tangible historical details from narratives based on faith and divine revelations. This does not imply, however, that the *Life of Muhammad* is a complete fabrication. The reader must be aware of the purpose and context of the source material.

Early Muslim literature had to legitimize Muhammad for their growing community, not just as another prophet but as *the final* prophet of strict monotheism. It was difficult, however, to produce biographies that traced his transition from an ordinary Arab pagan tribesman to a prophetic

[20] Wansbrough structured a Qur'anic context based on such topics as canon and revelation, exegesis, the formation of classical Arabia, and emblems of prophethood. See his *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), and *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). For an updated assessment of Western scholarship on the Qur'an, see Andrew Rippin, "Western Scholarship and the Qur'an," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 235-251.

monotheist.[21] The *Life of Muhammad*, then, stood as a collective vision of the formative years of the Prophet's life and the early Muslim community (c.632-750).[22]

To place Muhammad in a context in which he encountered Jews and Christians, but in these situations did not learn from them, the Muslim sources depict only brief encounters with People of the Book or with Biblical characters.[23] In fact, no meetings, interactions, or religious dialogue with other monotheists were thought to have affected the divine manner in which Muhammad received his revelations. The early Muslim literature on Muhammad places him within the

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[21] Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims* (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1995), 219-220.

[22] See Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1998). Donner argued that the formative Muslim histories were the most powerful tool for legitimation. Donner traced the development of these texts and focused on a tradition-critical approach to better understand the early Muslim period. Donner also argued that this growth for the need and interest in Muslim history was not a natural phenomenon but simply a requirement to substantiate Islam as a historical movement as Judaism and Christianity. The histories had to affirm Muhammad's role as a prophet, because by the mid eighth century the Muslim community first debated with Jews and Christians over theology and the historicity of the Qur'an and the *Life of Muhammad*. Geography was important in the construct of history as well. For example, Mecca, the home of the Quraysh tribe, produced traditions formed on the history of pre-Muslim Arabia that substantiated their role as Muslim leaders. Donner also maintained that the validity of Muslim sources derived from multiple channels which included certain family accounts, and various inscriptions and documents such as the *Constitution of Medina*. However, he did not address fully the concept of how accounts changed and were fabricated to support the abovementioned theory of legitimization.

[23] Muhammad's meetings with Biblical characters originated in the accounts of the *Night Journey*, the traditional tale in which he traveled on a winged steed to Jerusalem. Here Muhammad reported to have met and prayed with Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and a company of other prophets. Muhammad returned that night and described to his journey to his family and followers. For the *Night Journey*, see Qur'an 17:1 and 53:1-18.

already existing framework of Christian hagiographical writing, which offered Muslim writers a paradigm of attributes and characteristics that could be applied to the final monotheistic prophet.[24]

The *Life of Muhammad* relies on the transmission of oral authorities, or *isnads*, but the earliest histories they represented no longer exist. It must be noted, however, that arbitrary additions, modifications and elaborations were unavoidable in incorporating sources that were more oral and less written in nature.[25]

The traditional Muslim sources remain problematic for historians because they are not contemporary with the history of Muslim origins. In addition, the main written sources on Muslim origins contain a number of chronological problems, contradictions, embellishments, and inventions. The earliest Muslim historians did not place much importance on accurately recording the details of Muhammad's life because there was more of a need for the *Life* to stand as a literary companion to the revelation of the Qur'an, which was believed to be infallible. It is important, therefore, and indeed necessary, to consult

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[24] Andrew Rippin, "Literary Analysis of the Koran, Tafsir, and Sira: The Methodologies of John Wansbrough," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard Martin (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 151-163, 227-232, 360-361.

[25] See also, Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*, trans. Uwe Vagepohl, ed. James Montgomery (New York: Routledge, 2006).

extra-Muslim sources to reconstruct episodes of Muhammad's life and Muslim origins.[26]

Secondary Studies

John Spencer Trimingham, in his *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*,[27] presents not a history of Arab Christianity but instead a study of how Syriac Christianity influenced Arab society, while ultimately failing to establish an indigenous Arab church. Trimingham argues that Syriac Christianity represented celibate, holy elites who did not offer society any participation in their spiritual values.[28] This view, however, assumes that local Syrian Christians held no admiration for these elites and were merely bystanders who did not pursue this lifestyle.

Looking at select primary sources, Trimingham argues that Christianity was accepted only by Arabs who went through changes in politics and economics as they related to religious affiliation. Trimingham presents a thorough study of the social aspect of Syriac Christianity, but he does not address the manner in which certain Arabian groups

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[26] Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins,* 2-5, 147.
[27] John Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (New York: Longman, 1979).
[28] Ibid., 308-310. Not all believers, however, were turned away from the ascetic elite. In fact some were drawn to the lifestyle of the monastic elite and embraced the celibacy, obedience and poverty if offered.

might have understood Jesus according to non-canonical texts that they could have possessed.

Neal Robinson's *Christ in Islam and Christianity*[29] concentrates on the basic teachings of the Messiah as depicted in the Qur'an and in select Muslim commentaries. Robinson concludes that Muslim teachings on the Messiah do not reflect the unique, redemptive character of the Messiah as presented in Christianity. Robinson admits there is an uncertainty when it comes to the circumstances of Muhammad's revelations. He does not, however, fully address the possible influences on Muhammad's ascetic formation or the religious groups he may have encountered.

Geoffrey Parrinder takes a similar approach in *Jesus in the Quran*.[30] Parrinder looks at certain Qur'anic titles applied to Jesus such as *Word of God*, *Spirit of God*, *Messiah*, and *Sign of God*, and provides a brief commentary on the Muslim understanding of each term. Parrinder at times, however, seems more concerned with promoting interfaith dialogue than with presenting a textually based comparison between the Muslim Jesus and a non-Biblical Jesus.

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[29] Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

[30] Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Quran* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1965).

A thorough examination of Jesus' crucifixion as is shown in the Qur'an is Todd Lawson's *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Islamic Thought*.[31] The theme of this study is Sura 4:157-158 which mentions Jesus' crucifixion. Lawson analyzes the Muslim exegetical history of this verse through a sound chronological approach. He argues that Sura 4:157 does not accuse Christians of a false belief but rather condemns the Jews for boasting they had killed a Prophet of God. Lawson focuses on the Muslim exegesis of Jesus' crucifixion, but he neglects to address fully any pre-Muslim parallels which could have been the basis for Sura 4:157-158.[32]

A comprehensive view of the traditional Islamic position on Jesus in the Qur'an is addressed by Tarif Khalidi in *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature.*[33] Khalidi focused on eighth-century Iraq as the home of the Muslim "gospel." For Khalidi, the term "gospel" refers to the entire corpus of Islamic literature that developed during the eighth to eighteenth-centuries which centered on Jesus but not to one particular text. This

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[31] Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009).

[32] Unless otherwise noted, all Qur'an passages in this dissertation are taken from *The Qur'an*, trans. M.H. Shakir (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc., 1959).

[33] Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

literature contains devotionals, mystical writings, wisdom anthologies and histories of saints and prophets.[34]

Khalidi is fair in mentioning that Islam was itself born into an era in which Jesus was well-known among diverse religious communities in pre-Islamic Arabia. However, he states that the starting point for the examination of the Muslim Jesus is the Qur'an and not pre-Islamic Arabia. He claims that Western scholars in the early twentieth century took a polemic stance in their attempts to find the Qur'anic Jesus in Jewish or Jewish-Christian sects. If research, however, can uncover a possible origin for the Qur'anic Jesus, this should not be judged as polemic or as controversial. It should, however, be understood as an attempt to discover the manner in which an Arab merchant of the seventh century came to learn of a Jesus who lived nearly six centuries earlier.

Khalidi even suggests that reinterpretation through the disciplines of folklore and myth can lead to a more well-defined view of the Qur'anic Jesus. However, he remains uninterested in investigating any possible parallels with the Qur'anic Jesus with pre-Islamic sources. Khalidi also suggests that modern literary analysis should aim not to discover any influences upon the Qur'anic Jesus

[34] Ibid., introduction, 3.

from pre-Islamic communities, but instead address the text itself. I would argue against Khalidi's notion that a search for the origins of the Qur'anic Jesus is simply too complex to address. These origins deserve attention and any attempt has indeed to begin in pre-Islamic Arabia and move forward to the Qur'an.

Khalidi maintains that the intention of the Qur'an is to set the record straight regarding previously revealed scriptures. To clarify the origins of the Qur'anic Jesus, however, one must embrace the diverse communities and texts of pre-Islamic Arabia, whether these are Jewish, Christian, or "heretical." Any viable source, after all, should be examined to determine if they may help illuminate the foundations of the Jesus who is in the Qur'an.

The Qur'an states in Sura 5:14 that Christians are fated to exist in sectarian discord until the Final Judgment. Therefore, attempts to identify any parallels between pre-Islamic texts and the Qur'anic Jesus are, from the Muslim viewpoint, irrelevant and inconsequential. Only an act of God can reveal these truths. This view, however, cancels out nearly six centuries of history which could further explain how Jesus was transformed from the Son of God into a prophet and slave of Allah. *The Muslim Jesus* presents the Islamic understanding of Jesus very well.

However, disregarding the history and sources related to Jesus in pre-Islamic Arabian seems an ineffectual approach.

More recent studies suggest that the Qur'anic verses that are identified as pre-Muhammad verses represent a narrative collection--oral or written--that belonged to independent monotheistic communities in Arabia.

In *Muhammad and the Believers At the Origins of Islam* Fred Donner[35] argues that Muslim origins began in a movement he called the *Believers*. Muhammad is said to have begun this movement which stressed religious reforms and emphasized strict monotheism and moral behavior that was in harmony with God's revealed law as found in Muhammad's revelations. This movement initially included Christians and Jews, but they eventually separated from the *Believers* movement after Muslims decided that only those who believed that the Qur'an was God's final revelation and that Muhammad was the final prophet qualified as true followers. Donner argues that this separation occurred during the reign of Abd al-Malik (685-705) and split monotheists into those who followed the Bible and those who followed the revelations of Muhammad and what became the Qur'an. What Donner fails to address were the specifics of the *Believers*

[35] Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers at the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

themselves: who they could have been and which texts guided their beliefs and what was their influence upon Muhammad. After all, if Muhammad had been the leader of a *Believers* movement he would have had to present, for example, to the *Believers* a familiar Jesus if he had planned to maintain their allegiance.

Claude Gilliot[36] expresses a similar view and argues that parts of the Qur'an could have been formed by a group of "God-seekers" who were familiar with and used Biblical, non-Biblical, and other sources as a type of narrative collection that influenced the structure and formation of the Qur'an. According to this view, then, Jesus in the Qur'an would have been a product of these "God-seekers," and Muhammad would at least have been exposed to their textual sources. With this view, however, more specifics are required.

G. R. Hawting[37] argues that all the Qur'anic passages that attack polytheists actually refer to debates within intra-monotheistic groups. The views of these groups, however, fell short of Qur'anic standards, and those who held them were labeled polytheistic and became the focus of

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[36] Claude Gilliot, "Creation of a Fixed Text," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 41-57.

[37] G. R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

theological polemics. According to Hawting, however, the Qur'an does not reflect an Arabian background but suggests that the Arabs somehow forgot their collective history prior to the conquests (c.632-750). Most of his focus is on Qur'an terminology, which he interprets to substantiate his position. He even suggests that early Muslims were unable to recall who had received the Qur'an initially. For Hawting, the "start" of a collective Muslim consciousness began with the rise of the Abbasid Caliphate (c.750). Within these works there is not nearly enough effort to investigate the origins of Muhammad's influences.

The recent studies of Donner, Gilliot, and Hawting each offer innovative ideas on the possible influences of pre-Muslim groups upon the structure of the Qur'an, but they do not detail the specifics of such groups and the texts which qualified such groups as Believers or "God-seekers." In addition, these studies do not address the influences of these groups and their texts upon the way in which Muhammad understood Jesus or the question of where there are any direct Qur'anic parallels with pre-Islamic non-biblical texts. I intend to focus on these questions.

The parallels, then, between the Jesus portrayed in pre-Muslim religious groups and the Jesus of the Qur'an are of great importance and are the focus of this study.

CHAPTER 1

CHRISTIAN ORIGINS IN ARABIA

Paul's Trip to Arabia

A starting point[1] for researching Christianity in Arabia concerns Paul and his trip to Arabia mentioned in Galatians 1:17-18. According to this passage, Paul's Gentile mission was preceded by a sojourn in Arabia before he consulted with or sought advice from the apostles in Jerusalem.[2]

> ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι (17) οὐδὲ ανῆλθον εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα πρὸς τοὺς πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἀποστόλους ἀλλὰ ἀπῆλθον εἰς Ἀραβίαν καὶ πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα εἰς Δαμασκόν (18) Ἔπειτα μετὰ ἔτη τρία ἀνῆλθον εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα ἱστορῆσαι κηθᾶν καὶ ἐπέμεινα πρὸς αὐτὸν ἡμέρας δεκαπέντε.[3]

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[1] An initial passage to address is Acts 2:9-11, which is the account of Pentecost. The account can be found in Acts 2:2-4 and 20:16 and 1 Corinthians 16:8. The Jews in attendance at Pentecost are listed in a geographical grouping and Arabia is mentioned last among all these nations.

[2] In his commentary on this passage, Tertullian emphasized Paul's conversion from a persecutor to a preacher and stressed the importance for Paul to see Peter in Jerusalem. See Tertullian, *On Prescription Against Heretics*, ch. xxiii in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, Alexander Roberts James Donaldson, ed., (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 4th printing, 2004), 254. Also see Jerome, *Letter LII.II, To Paulinus* in *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6, Philip Schaff, Henry Wace, eds. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 4th printing, 2004), 97. In this letter Jerome stated that Paul visited Damascus, Arabia and then went to Jerusalem to see Peter for fifteen days.

[3] For this and all New Testament passages I will be using *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 4th Revised ed., Barbara Aland, et al, eds.

"In order that I might proclaim him [Jesus] to the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult flesh and blood (17) nor go up to Jerusalem to those apostles before me, rather I went away into Arabia and returned again to Damascus. (18) Then after three years I went into Jerusalem to get to know Kephas [Peter] and to remain with him fifteen days."[4]

There are a number of theories regarding Paul's trip to Arabia--where he went, how long he was there, and what he did there--but the answers remain uncertain. Some suggest that Paul preached with some success to Jewish communities while in Arabia.[5] Evidence for this view comes from 2 Cor. 11:32, in which we learn how Paul escaped the clutches of the Nabataean King Aretas IV.[6] In Galatians 4:25 Paul states, "Hagar represents Sinai, a mountain in Arabia." This has led some to suggest that Paul went to

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(Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1998). I will provide my own Greek translations throughout this study.

[4] Galatians, 1:17-18.

[5] See Rainer Riesner, Doug Scott, trans. *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdman's Co., 1988), 259. Riesner notices that the term *ethnarch* was used in similar fashion by Strabo in his *Geography*, 17:78 and by Josephus when they describe an Alexandrian population run by a local Jew. See Josephus, *Antiquities,* trans., William Whiston in *The New Complete Works of Josephus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 463.

[6] Riesner, 258. Accounts of Paul and Aretas IV are found in 2 Corinthians 11:32 and Acts 9:23-25. Also see Douglas A. Campbell, "An Anchor for Pauline Chronology: Paul's Flight from "The Ethnarch of King Aretas" (2 Corinthians 11:32-33) *JBL* 121, no. 2 (Summer, 2002): 279-302. On the political situation involving Aretas IV see S. Thomas Parker, "The Decapolis Revisited," *JBL* 94 (1975):437-441.

Mount Sinai[7] to reflect on the giving of the Law and to ponder his new law of evangelization.[8] There is, then, no evidence that Paul evangelized while in Arabia, but instead he reflected on the new dispensation and prepared for his future work.[9]

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[7] This is in the present day Sinai Peninsula of Egypt. For the possible location of Mount Sinai, see George Forsyth, "The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 22 (1968):1-19. For a similar view, see also G.I. Davies, "Hagar, el-Hegra and the Location of Mount Sinai: With an Additional Note on Regem," *Vetus Testamentum* 22, Facs. 2 (April, 1972):152-163.

[8] N.T. Wright, "Paul, Arabia, and Elijah," *JBL* 115, no. 4 (Winter, 1996):683-692.

[9] Muslim views of Paul maintain that he was not considered a disciple but only a follower of Jesus. In addition, a popular *Hadith* emphasizes that no prophet was sent between Jesus and Muhammad, which further nullifies any idea of Paul being a disciple or an apostle. This signifies the closeness later expressed in Islam between Muhammad and Jesus; see *The Life of Muhammad*, *Messengers Sent to the Various Kingdoms*, 972, Guillaume, 653; see *Sahih al-Bukhari*, 4:55: 651-52. The New Testament suggests that prophets and apostles did come after Jesus. See 1 Cor. 1:1, Gal. 1:1, Matthew 23:34, Acts 11:27-30, 13:1-3, 15:32, 21:8-13, Romans 16:7, 1 Cor. 12:28-29 and Ephesians 4:11. An example of the Muslim view of Paul is found within a traditional tale that was used by Muslims to explain Paul's corruption of Christianity and its scriptures. The story is as follows: An evil Jewish king and his vizier developed a plan to exterminate the local Christian community. The king cut off the ears, hands and nose of the vizier and then banished him into exile. The vizier took refuge among the Christians and won their confidence by pretending that he had he suffered his mutilation for their faith. So great was his deceit that he won their favor and became a witness for Christ. He claimed to have the original gospels and gave one copy to each of the local twelve Christian tribes and secretly appointed each as his successor. The scrolls, however, contradicted each other on important matters of doctrine, and the vizier committed suicide after he realized that the differences in doctrine would lead to divisions over doctrine. In the Muslim world the vizier of this tale came to be identified as Paul and his later martyrdom in Rome came to be explained as an "invention" that was used to cover up his suicide; see R.A. Nicholson, "Some Notes on Arabian and Persian Folklore," *Folklore* 4 (Dec., 1930):353. See also, Lloyd Ridgeon, "Christianity as portrayed by Jalal al-Din Rumi," in *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity*, Lloyd Ridgeon, ed., (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 109-110; see Neal Robinson, "Sayyid Qutb's Attitude Towards Christianity: Sura 9:29-35 in Fi Zilal Qur'an," in *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity*, Lloyd Ridgeon, ed., (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 167. In his commentary on Sura 9:29-35,

Although Arabia is mentioned only twice in all of Paul's letters, in Galatians 1:17-18 and 4:25, Paul considered Arabia a specific area. To a first-century Jew such as Paul, Arabia was understood to be the area on the eastern desert side of the Decapolis[10] beyond the cities of Damascus, Philadelphia and Raphana. Josephus[11] states that looking east from the tower of Psephinus at the northwest corner of the third wall around Jerusalem one could see the mountains of Arabia.[12] Paul's Arabia, then, corresponds to modern-day northeast Jordan.[13]

Sayyid Qutb followed the ideas put forward by the poet Rumi and blamed Paul for inventing the idea that Jesus was the Son of God and to worship him. Qutb stressed that Jesus taught the oneness of God, that Paul invented the Trinity and that Jesus himself did not say he was part of a Trinity. See also, S. M. Stern, "Abd al-Jabbar's Account of How Christ's Religion was Falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs," *JTS* XIX, part 1 (April, 1968):28-185.

[10] This "ten-city" Greco-Roman federation was started by Pompey the Great c. 64 BCE and contained the cities of Scythopolis, Hippos, Gadara, Pella, Philadelphia, Damascus, Dion, Gerasa, Kanatha and Raphana. Also see Matt. 4:25 and Mark 5:20, 7:31. See James Pritchard, ed., *Harper Collins Atlas of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Borders Press, 1999), 150, 157, 168, 181. Justin Martyr insisted the Magi came from Arabia and placed Damascus in the region of Arabia in his *Dialogue with Trypho*. See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, LXXVIII, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 4th printing, 2004),1:237-238. Tertullian also agreed that Damascus was part of Arabia before it was considered part of Syro-Phoenicia; Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 3:13, in *ANF*, 3:332 and *Against Jews*, 9, in *ANF*, 3:162.

[11] For the life of Josephus, see *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, trans. William Whiston in *The New Complete Works of Josephus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 17-44.

[12] Josephus, *JW*, 5:160, Whiston, 853.

[13] See Arthur Segal, "Roman Cities in the Province of Arabia," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 40, no. 2 (May, 1981):108-121.

Pantaenus and "Middle India"

Another Christian traveler who went to Arabia, somewhat later, was Pantaenus of Alexandria (d.c.200). His second-century journey led him to a mysterious "middle India" where he found a Hebrew *Gospel of Matthew*. Pantaenus[14] was the founder of the catechetical school in Alexandria and was said to have in Arabia found a *Gospel of Matthew* in Hebrew. It was also called the *Gospel According to the Hebrews* and was popular among Jews who had accepted Christ.[15]

Eusebius states that when Pantaenus reached Arabia, he "found out that the word was first brought there in the Gospel of Matthew, which the apostle Bartholomew had preached to them in Hebrew. He [Bartholomew] left the writing behind and it had clearly been kept safe at that time."[16] Eusebius also details Pantaenus' familiarity and

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[14] Eusebius also included the following on Pantaenus: "They say, therefore, that he displayed such very spirited zeal concerning the word of God that he took it upon himself to even be a preacher of the gospel according to Christ and that he commenced for the nations of the east and was dispatched as far as the land of India." Eusebius, *HE*, 5:10:2-3, Lake, 462. Hereafter, all references to Eusebius' *Church History* will be *HE* followed by chapter and verse. Eusebius also added that Pantaenus became one of many evangelists of the word.

[15] Eusebius, *HE*, 3:25:5, Lake, 256. The *Panarion* states that the Nazaraeans had the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew and that the Ebionites possessed the Gospel of Matthew, but called it "according to the Hebrews. Philip R. Amidon, trans. and ed., *The Panarion of St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis: Select Passages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 29:9:4, 30:3:7, Amidon, 93 ,95.

[16] Eusebius, *HE,* 5:10:2-3, Lake, 462.

interest in contemporary doctrines that were seen as heretical, and in a visit to south Arabia he could have evaluated the text and the community that was linked to Bartholomew.[17]

Jerome (c.347-420) later adds that "Pantaenus...was sent to India by Demetrius, bishop of Alexandria, where he found that Bartholomew, one of the twelve apostles, had preached the advent of the Lord Jesus according to the *Gospel of Matthew*, and on his return to Alexandria he brought this with him written in Hebrew characters."[18] Jerome continues, "Matthew...composed a gospel of Christ at first published in Judea in Hebrew...but this was afterwards translated into Greek though by what author is uncertain. The Hebrew itself has been preserved until the present day in the library at Caesarea...I have also had the opportunity of having the volume described to me by the Nazarenes of Beroea,[19] a city of Syria."[20]

Eusebius records that the Ebionites used only "the gospel according to the Hebrews," which may be the aforementioned *Hebrew Matthew*, and adds that various branches of the Ebionites followed different traditions.

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[17] Eusebius, *HE,* 5:10:4, Lake, 462.
[18] Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, XXXVI, in *NPNF*, 3:370.
[19] Modern Aleppo.
[20] Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, III, in *NPNF*, 3:362.

For example, one branch considered Jesus a common man while another believed Jesus was the offspring of a virgin and the Holy Spirit. The Ebionites were also said to have denied the preexistence of Jesus, but its members observed the Sabbath and elements of other Jewish disciplines.[21] The fourth-century *Panarion* by Epiphanius of Salamis also notes that the Nazaraeans (Nazarenes) had a *Hebrew Matthew* and that the Ebionites were a later offshoot of the Nazaraeans. According to the *Panarion* the Nazoraeans and the Ebionites were each found in Cocaba and Arabia, east of the Sea of Galilee.[22]

But when did Pantaenus take his trip? As Jerome mentioned, Bishop Demetrius of Alexandria commissioned Pantaenus to undertake his journey. According to Eusebius (*HE* 5:22) Demetrius was consecrated in the tenth year of Commodus, i.e. 190. Pantaenus ended up in the area to which where Bartholomew had taken a *Hebrew Matthew* and this was south Arabia, modern Yemen.[23] The ancient Greeks recognized middle, greater, and lesser India. Middle India included Ethiopia and South Arabia. Pantaenus later trained

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[21] Eusebius, *HE,* 3:27:1-3, Lake, 260, 262.

[22] *Panarion*, 29:7:7, 30:2:9, Amidon, 93-95.

[23] Muslims also accept the tradition that Bartholomew came to Arabia, in particular to the Hijaz, the Red Sea side of Arabia that includes Mecca and Medina. See the *Life of Muhammad*, *Messengers Sent to the Various Kingdoms*, 972, Guillaume, 653.

missionaries to go to Yemen from Alexandria.[24] The first century *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*[25] indicates that the Island of Socotra, off the coast of modern Yemen, was Christian by c.50 because the Apostle Thomas had made frequent stops there on his way to greater India, which is India proper.[26] Writing in the tenth century, Muslim geographer Abu Zaid Hassan says that this area had remained Christian as a result of the activity of early Christian missionaries.[27]

In Christian circles as late as the fourth century, an "inner" India was frequently identified as being either in Ethiopia or South Arabia.[28] The geographic account given by Palladius (c.360-430) identified Axum in Ethiopia as part

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[24] See also, George Smith, *The Conversion of India: From Pantaenus to the Present time A.D. 193-1893* (London: John Murray Publishers, 1893), 11-15.

[25] The best source that suggests where Bartholomew and Pantaenus went is a first-century text known as the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (The Circumnavigation of the Red Sea). Today it is preserved in a single manuscript, the *Codex Palantinus Graecus* no. 398 in the Universitas Bibliothek, Heidelberg. It dates to the beginning of the tenth century. Wilfred Schoff determined that the *Periplus* was written between 54 and 84 M.P. Charlesworth concluded that the *Periplus* was written between c. 37-70, and while studying the names of kings mentioned in the *Periplus*, G.W.B. Huntingford concluded the date falls c. 95-130. For these studies, see *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea: Anonymous*, trans. G.W.B. Huntingford, (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1980); M.P. Charlesworth, "Some Notes on the Periplus Maris Erythraei," *The Classical Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (Apr., 1928): 92-100; Wilfred Schoff, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea: Travel and Trade in the Indian Ocean by a Merchant of the First Century* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912). See Gus W. van Beek, "Pre-Islamic South Arabian Shipping in the Indian Ocean – A Surrejoinder," *JAOS* 80, no. 2 (Apr.-Jun., 1960): 136-139.

[26] Note that this claim may be strictly apocryphal.

[27] See Huntingford, *Periplus*, 103.

[28] Philip Mayerson, "A Confusion of Indias: Asian and African India in the Byzantine Sources," *JAOS* 113, no. 2 (Apr.-Jun., 1993):169-174.

of India, but this may have referred to a group of Indian exporters who lived there.[29]

The Arian historian Philostorgius (c.368-430) describes the mission work of one Theophilus the Indian. Emperor Constantius sent him as an emissary to inner India, a rich area that the emperor wished to convert to Christianity. Here Theophilus is said to have built churches and performed miracles.[30] Philostorgius also confirms that the Christians in India were first converted by Bartholomew, but that they believed that Jesus as the Son of God was not of the same substance as the Father of the Christian Trinity; as an Arian, Theophilus had brought them this doctrine. Philostorgius confirmed South Arabia as India because he stated that these Indians were now called Homeritae, instead of Sabaeans, their original name, which had been based on their city of Saba in South Arabia. These "Indians" (Homeritae/Sabaeans) who converted traced their Jewish roots through the line of Keturah, Abraham's wife after Sarah, and were quasi-Israelites who practiced

[29] J. Duncan M. Derrett, "The History of Palladius on the Races of India and the Brahmans," *Classica and Mediaevalia* 21 (1969):77.

[30] Philostorgius, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Edward Walford (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1855), 4:41-44, 15:62, Walford, 443-445, 457; see Samuel Hugh Moffet, *A History of Christianity in Asia* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 267.

circumcision, but they were said to have made sacrifices to the sun, moon and the native gods of Arabia.[31]

The *Gospel of the Hebrews*

Eusebius counted the *Gospel According to the Hebrews* as ἐν τοῖς νόθοις κατατετάχθω or "classified in the counterfeit" books outside the New Testament canon: "There are also some who number among these the gospel according to the Hebrews, with which those of the Hebrews who received Christ are particularly delighted."[32] Eusebius also mentioned that "Matthew composed his history in the Hebrew dialect, and everyone translated it as he was able."[33] The transmission among various groups that possessed a Hebrew version of Matthew could easily have transformed this text into the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*.

It was noted above that this *Gospel of the Hebrews* was kept in the library at Caesarea. Thus, the text was accessible to local Jews and Christians. It has eleven parallels with the canonical Greek Matthew, twelve with

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[31] The *Christian Topography* of the sixth century, which was later attributed to Cosmas Indicopleustes, describes first-hand trade knowledge of the Red Sea and suggests India to be in South Asia. For this position see *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk*, trans. and ed., J.W. McCrindle (New York: Burt Franklin Publishers, 1897). For the Alexandrian influence of the text, see Milton V. Anastos, "The Alexandrian Origin of the 'Christian Topography' of Cosmas Indicopleustes," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 3 (1946):73-80.

[32] Eusebius, *HE*, 3:25:5, Lake, 256.

[33] Eusebius, *HE*, 3:39:15-17, Lake, 296.

Luke[34] and seven with Mark. Papias,[35] Irenaeus,[36] Origen,[37] Eusebius,[38] Epiphanius,[39] and Jerome[40] believed that Matthew had written a gospel in Hebrew, and later writers identified the Hebrew version of Matthew as this *Gospel According to the Hebrews*.[41]

In his list of divisions in the *Panarion*, Epiphanius states that the *Diatessaron* was also known as "according to Hebrews."[42] The *Diatessaron* is a harmonization of the canonical gospels, and the author, Tatian, identified himself as an Assyrian.[43] After his break with the Church, c.172, Tatian returned to Mesopotamia where, it is said, he

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[34] Pierson Parker, "A Proto-Lukan Basis for the Gospel According to the Hebrews," *JBL* 59, no. 4 (Dec., 1940):471-478. See George Howard, *The Gospel of Matthew according to a Primitive Hebrew Text* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 181, 194, 224; James Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009).

[35] Eusebius, *HE*, 3:39:15-16, Lake, 296.

[36] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3:1:1, in *ANF*, 1:414

[37] Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, 1:1, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9, trans. John Patrick (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 4th printing, 2004),9:412.

[38] Eusebius, *HE*, 3:24:5-6, Lake, 250.

[39] *Panarion*, 51:5:3, Williams (1994), 29.

[40] Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, III, in *NPNF*, 3:362.

[41] For the Jewish roots of the *Gospel of the Hebrews* see William Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha,* vol. 1*: Gospels and Related Writings,* English translation edited by R. Wilson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 172-178.

[42] *Panarion*, 46:1:9, Williams (1987), 349.

[43] Tatian, *Address*, 42, in *ANF*, 2:81-82. For the question of the reliability of the *Diatessaron*, see Leslie McFall, "Tatian's Diatessaron: Mischievous or Misleading?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994):87-114. Saint Ephrem of Edessa (d.c.378) wrote a series of commentaries on the *Diatessaron* and added his own descriptions of torments and pleasures connected to hymns related to the flowing gospel narrative. For Ephrem's descriptions of Paradise see Saint Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans., Sebastian Brock (Crestwood, NJ: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 39-72.

founded the Encratites. Irenaeus mentioned the tenets of the Encratites and Hippolytus added that even Paul spoke out against the "prideful ascetics" in 1 Timothy 4:1-5. If this is the case, then the Encratites would have been around well before Tatian.[44]

Sources indicate that Bartholomew left a *Hebrew Matthew* after he initially preached in south Arabia, and Pantaenus later found this *Hebrew Matthew* and returned with a copy to Alexandria. Jerome states that the Nazarenes had a copy in Syria, and according to the *Panarion* the Ebionites in Arabia used the text. Eusebius[45] states that the Ebionites used only *Hebrew Matthew*. According to Epiphanius, the *Diatessaron* was used by the Nazaraeans,[46] Encratites,[47] Ebionites[48] and Tatianites. Chapter 4 will address the probability that a *Hebrew Matthew* or a *Gospel According to the Hebrews* was in fact the same text that came to be known as *Pseudo-Matthew*.

The next Christian personality who had a great impact in Arabia was Origen of Alexandria. He made three trips to

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[44] For these accounts, see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1:28:1, in *ANF*, 1:353; and Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, 8:13, in *ANF*, 5:124.

[45] Eusebius, *HE*, 3:27:4, Lake, 262.

[46] *Panarion*, 29:9:4, Williams (1987), 119.

[47] In the *Panarion*, the Tatianites are numbered 46 and are followed by the Encratites, listed at 47. Epiphanius suggested these groups used the same texts; see *Panarion*, 47:1:5, Williams (1994), 3-4 and *Panarion*, 46:1:9, Williams (1987), 349.

[48] *Panarion*, 30:3:7, Williams (1987), 122.

Arabia to deal with theological division, and these trips offer further insight into developing Christian diversity in Arabia.

CHAPTER 2

ORIGEN, BERYLLUS, ELCHASAITES, AND SARACEN-JEWS

Origen and Arabian Christianity

Origen is important to the study of Christians in pre-Muslim Arabia because he made three trips to deal with theological dissension in the Arabian church. He debated with Beryllus, bishop of Bostra, over such ideas as the death and resurrection of the soul and the pre-existence and divinity of Jesus.

Before Eusebius addresses Origen's time in Arabia, he first mentions the works of others who flourished in the second and third centuries. One of these was a man from Arabia, known simply as Arabianus: "Indeed great works of ancient churchmen are preserved still now, the memorials of productive zeal. Those which we would select might be...a certain question for discussion that was introduced by Arabianus."[1] Jerome also mentions Arabianus in *Lives of Illustrious Men*: "Arabianus under the same emperor published certain small works relating to Christian

[1] Eusebius, *HE*, 5:27:1, Lake, 514.

doctrine."[2] Since Arabianus[3] flourished c.196, the emperor referred to was Lucius Septimius Severus (r.193-211). Unfortunately, the available sources on Arabianus do not specify the title or content of the pieces he wrote.

Eusebius mentions Origen's trip to Arabia:

> κατὰ τοῦτον δὲ τὸν χρόνον ἐπ᾽᾽Αλεξανδρείας αὐτῷ τὰς διατριβὰς ποιουμένῳ ἐπιστάς τις τῶν στρατιωτικῶν ἀνεδίδου γράμματα Δημητρίῳ τε τῷ τῆς παροικίας ἐπισκόπῳ καὶ τῷ τότε τῆς Αἰγύπτου ἐπάρχῳ παρὰ τοῦ τῆς᾽Αραβίας ἡγουμένου ὡς ἂν μετά σπουδῆς ἁπάσης τὸν᾽Ωριγένην πέμφοιεν κοινωνήσοντα λόγων αὐτῷ. καὶ δὴ ἀφικνεῖται᾽επὶ τὴν᾽Αραβίαν οὐκ εἰς μαχρὸν δὲ τὰ τῆς ἀφίξεως εἰς πέρας᾽αγαγών αὖθις ἐπὶ τὴν᾽Αλεξάδρειαν ἐπανῄει.[4]
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> And during this period, while spending time and staying in Alexandria, a certain soldier made a letter public to the bishop of the parish, Demetrius, and to the prefect of Egypt at the time, from the governor of Arabia, who with all eagerness wanted Origen sent on a mission communicating to him his points of view. Therefore he reached Arabia, and concluded his trip not long after he had arrived and then he returned to Alexandria.[5]

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[2] Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men, LI*, in *NPNF*, 3:373.

[3] He is not to be confused with another Arabianus, bishop of Ancyra, who attended the Council of Constantinople in 394.

[4] After this first trip Origen is said to have gone to Palestine where, as a layman, he preached Scripture to local bishops. See Eusebius, *HE*, 6:19:15, Oulton, 62.

[5] Sources suggest the governor of Arabia at this time was Furnius Iulianus, the consul-designate for the year 214. He would have sent the soldier and letters to Demetrius and L. Baebius Aurelius Iuncinus, the prefect of Egypt. See Robert Grant, *Augustus to Constantine* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1970), 204; Kenneth Cragg, *The Arabian Christian: A History in the Middle East* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 37. For more on Furnius see Paul M. Leunissen, "Direct Promotions from Proconsul to Consul under the Principate," *Zeitschrift für Papyrlogie and Epigraphik* 89 (1991):217-260. According to Eusebius, Furnius displayed personal interest in the Christian faith, and we know this because he went out of his way to build a milestone on the pilgrim route from Jerusalem to the sanctuary on Mount Nebo. This was discovered by the Franciscan Archaeological Institute in 1996, and the inscription reads: "The works were carried out by order of the governor Furnius Iulianus in 213, at the time of Emperor Caracalla." See Michele Piccirillo, *The Roman Milestone*. Franciscan Archaeological Institute, http://198.62.75.1/www1/ofm/fai/FAImil.html. Accessed in March of 2009. Furnius thought highly enough of Origen to

Origen most likely went to the city of Bostra, in modern Jordan, because he returned there to settle theological debates with Beryllus, the local bishop.[6] At that time, however, parts of Jordan were in the province of Arabia that had been annexed by Emperor Trajan in 106; therefore, Bostra can be identified as part of Arabia.[7]

Eusebius first mentions Beryllus when he discussed the learned men of the day and their writings: "Τούτων Βήρυλλος σὺν ἐπιστολαῖς καὶ συγγραμμάτων διαφόρους φιλοκαλίας καταλέλοιπεν ἐπίσκοπος δ᾽ ὗυτος ἦν τῶν κατὰ Βόστραν Ἀράβων."[8] "Of these Beryllus left behind elegant letters along with different writings and this man was the bishop of Bostra in Arabia." So, at least at this point, Beryllus was considered a positive contributor from Arabia to orthodox Christian literature.

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invite him to Arabia to explain Christian doctrine to a growing, interested population, or even to his personal court.

[6] Most of the material on Beryllus is drawn from the *Church History* of Eusebius. See Eusebius, *The Church History: A New Translation with Commentary*, trans. Paul Maier (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 223, 230-231.

[7] Trajan renamed the city Nova Trajana Bostra. Today it is Busra, Syria. See G.W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) and Cyril Richardson, "The Condemnation of Origen," *Church History* 6, no. 1 (Mar., 1937):50-64; Robert Grant, "Early Alexandrian Christianity," *Church History* 40, no. 2 (Jun., 1971):133-144. For the controversy over Origen's preaching, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[8] Eusebius, *HE*, 6:20:1-2, Oulton, 64.

The Views of Beryllus of Bostra

Eusebius dedicates all of chapter thirty-three in his *Church History* to the conflict between Origen and Beryllus. The passage is lengthy, so it will be presented in three sections. Here is the first:

> Beryllus, who we indicated a little while before as bishop of Bostra in Arabia, diverted from ecclesiastical principles, attempted to add inconsistent, foreign things to the faith; daring to say our Savior and Lord did not come forth into the dwelling of men and appear according to his own designed substance and indeed does not have a divinity of his own but rather that which came from the father.[9]

In addition:

> Many bishops carried on investigations [with Beryllus] concerning this. Origen, who was requested with the others, went into a meeting with the man to understand his reasoning. But when he understood the declarations and certain other things, and was shown to have an unorthodox reasoning through the examination; he [Origen] stood by the truth concerning dogma and brought him [Beryllus] back to earlier sound teaching. And even today the writings of Beryllus, of the synod called on his account, together with the investigations of Origen and the discussions concerning his parish is part of all the collected writing from that time.[10]

Jerome also provides a brief passage on Beryllus: "Beryllus, bishop of Bostra in Arabia, after he had ruled the church gloriously for a little while, finally lapsed into the heresy which denies that Christ existed before the incarnation...He was distinguished during the reign of

[9] Eusebius, *HE*, 6:33:1, Oulton, 86.
[10] Eusebius, *HE*, 6:33:2-3, Oulton, 86.

Alexander, son of Mamaea, and Maximinus and Gordianus, who succeeded him in power."[11]

Origen's Return to Arabia

Even after Origen's initial dealings with Beryllus, however, theological errors persisted in Arabia:

> And furthermore, others in Arabia once again introduced a doctrine at the time that was foreign to the faith, making it clear they were closely held to it. They indeed said according to the present time that the human soul dies together and perishes with the body, but at the critical moment of the resurrection, they will come to life again anew, and at last be with each other. And then, accordingly, a large synod was organized. Furthermore, Origen was requested and publicly spoke there on the debate in such a moving way that he brought the thoughts of those first fallen in error to be changed.[12]

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[11] Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, *LX*, in *NPNF*, 3:375. For a possible link between Beryllus and Paul of Samosata see Fergus Millar, "Paul of Samosata, Zenobia, and Aurelian: The Church, Local Culture and Political Allegiance in Third-Century Syria," *JRS* 61 (1997):1-17. Eusebius also mentioned Paul in *HE,* 7:27:1-2 and 7:28:1-2, Oulton, 208-210. Also see Malchion, "*Against Paul of Samosata*," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* vol. 6, trans. S.D.F. Salmond (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 4th printing, 2004), 169-172; J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (Peabody, MA: 2004), 117-119, 158-160.

[12] Eusebius, *HE*, 6:37:1, Oulton, 90. Debates on the soul continued and led to a synod in 362, which mentioned Beryllus and confirmed Jesus had a soul at the Incarnation. Other works concerning the soul include *On the Subject of the Soul* by Gregory Thaumaturgus in *ANF*, 6:54-56. During his third trip to Arabia, Origen debated these questions on the soul with another bishop, Heraclides, towards the end of Emperor Philip's reign c.247-249. The surviving manuscript was copied by a scribe attending the events but apparently was never edited by Origen himself. The synod consisted of local bishops and a lay audience, including Heraclides. From the question and answer section it appears that Heraclides attempted to conceal his theological beliefs behind a type of quasi-orthodox creed. See Robert J. Daly, trans. and ed., *Origen: Treatise on the Passover and Dialogue of Origen with Heraclides and His Fellow Bishops on the Father, the Son, and the Soul* in *Ancient Christian Writers*, 54, Walter J. Burghardt, et al, eds., (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 20-23.

The Elchasaites

Following a chapter (37) on Arabian theological dissension, Eusebius discusses the Elchasaites, which presents parallels with aspects of Muhammad's prophetic career.[13] Eusebius relates that Origen mentioned the Elchasaites in a public homily on the eighty-second Psalm:

> A certain one recently[14] came with a great opinion of his powers, and maintained that ungodly and profane error called that of the Helkesaites,[15] which has newly appeared in the churches. I tell you what this error says so that you do not venture off, are seized, and carried away with it. It sets aside certain parts of all the scriptures, again borrowing from the Old Testament and the gospels. It completely sets aside the apostle [Paul]. And it is of the opinion that to refuse [Christ] is indifferent and that a well minded person, under force, will deny with his mouth but not his heart. And they produce a certain book, which they say fell down from heaven and whoever hears this and believes will receive forgiveness of sins, a forgiveness different from that given by Christ.[16]

According to Epiphanius' *Panarion*, the Elchasaites derived from the Ossaeans and originated east of the Dead Sea in Arabia.[17] The *Panarion* also states that the Ossaeans/

[13] Hippolytus also discusses the Elchasites in *Refutation of All Heresies,* trans. J.H. MacMahon, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* vol. 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 4th printing, 2004), 9:8, 5:132-34, 149. Hippolytus states that Elchasai [a variant spelling] received the book in Parthia from an angel ninety-six miles high and that a certain Alcibiades eventually brought a version of the book to Rome. Followers of Elchasai were circumcised, followed the Law, and used fragments of existing heresies. They also asserted that Jesus was a mere man and that he would come and appear from time to time in the guise of different people.

[14] In the days of Emperor Trajan, 98-117.

[15] Here the initial "H" is added for the rough-breathing accent in the Greek language.

[16] Eusebius, *HE*, 6:38:1, Oulton, 90, 92.

[17] Pritchard, 151; *Panarion*, 19:1:1-4, 19:2:1 Williams, (1987), 44-45.

Elchasaites came to be called the Sampsaeans and were not Jews or Christians but something in between. They emphasized belief in one God and in baptism and followed some Jewish practices.[18]

Moreover, Elxai supposedly wrote a book under prophetic inspiration and his brother, Jexai, introduced more doctrines he claimed came from further revelations. Epiphanius further states that the followers of Elxai used only *Hebrew Matthew*, and Eusebius says the same of the Ebionites. In addition to *Hebrew Matthew*, the Elchasaites used the *Ascents of James,*[19] an *Acts of the Apostles* different from the canonical version,[20] and an *Itinerary of Peter*.[21]

Linking together a few of the groups that are mentioned in the *Panarion* by Epiphanius leads to the Qur'an itself. The *Panarion* explained that the prophet Elxai of the Elchasaites sprang from the Ossaeans, who became known as the Sampsaeans; the latter were also identified as the

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[18] *Panarion*, 53:1:2-3, Williams, (1994), 70.

[19] *Panarion*, 30:16:7, Williams, (1987), 132.

[20] *Panarion*, 30:16:6, Williams, (1987), 132.

[21] Epiphanius suggested the Elchasaites and Ebionites used common texts, which included an *Itinerary of Peter*; see *Panarion*, 19:5:4-6, 30:15:1-3, Williams, (1987), 47, 87. It is possible that this *Itinerary* derived from or is the same as the Petrine texts Eusebius listed as the "dialogues of Peter;" see Eusebius, *HE*, 3:38:5, Lake, 290 and F. Lapham, *Peter: The Myth, the Man and the Writings: A Study of Early Petrine Text and Tradition* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 103-106.

Elchaesaeans.[22] Arab author, En-Hedim, wrote of a desert group, the Sabians, still existing when he wrote in the late tenth century,[23] so they must have existed during Muhammad's lifetime. The Sabians had moved north from Arabia to Mesopotamia, practiced frequent religious washings and considered one El-Chasai as their founder.[24] This suggests that Elxai (Elchasai) of the Elchasaites was indeed the founder of this group, who are identified in the Qur'an as the Sabians.[25]

Sabians are mentioned three times in the Qur'an. In Sura 2:62 and 5:69 they are commended with Christians and Jews for believing in God and promised they will be rewarded for doing good and believing in the Last Day; they need not fear or grieve. In Sura 22:17 they are grouped with Zoroastrians and will be separately judged from pagans and polytheists on the day of resurrection.

Elxai apparently founded the Sabians, who are mentioned in the Qur'an, so it remains likely that Muhammad

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[22] *Panarion*, 19:2:1, Williams, (1987), 45; this is a variant spelling of the Elchasaites.

[23] Gerard P. Luttikhuizen, *Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum: The Revelation of Elchasai: Investigations into the Evidence for a Mesopotamian Jewish Apocalypse of the Second Century and Its Reception by Judeo-Christian Propagandists* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1985), 7.

[24] Henry Wallace, William Percy, ed. *Dictionary of Early Christian Biography and Literature to the End of the Sixth Century A.D., with an Account of the Principal Sects and Heresies* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1911), 292-293.

[25] The Qur'anic Sabians should not be confused with the ancient Sabaeans from south Arabia.

was familiar with the Elchasaite concept of the *True Prophet*. According to the *Cologne Mani Codex*,[26] Elxai possessed a library of writings that he attributed to Old Testament forefathers and believed in the recurring appearance of a *True Prophet*.

A recent study notes that the model of prophecy in the Qur'an is comparable to that found among early Jewish-Christian[27] groups, which I will discuss in chapter 4. In relation to the title the *True Prophet*, Muhammad was

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[26] For a look at the connection between Mani and the Elchasaites, see John C. Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmology* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1992), 1-2, 207-209.

[27] Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 76-77. Here I use the term "Jewish-Christian" only as it was used by Donner. The term is usually used by scholars to refer to groups that were of Jewish origin who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah but maintained their use of the Torah. Richard Longenecker suggests that the term Jewish-Christian refers to more than simple nationality and could be applied to a particular group or groups who had accepted Jesus as a prophet and as the Messiah but did not accept him as the divine Son of God. These groups also maintained their strict monotheism. The term could also refer to Jews who had accepted Jesus as a prophet and as the Messiah but retained their use of the Mosaic Law. Still yet, Longenecker states that "Jewish-Christian" may well even apply to successive historical periods in which Jews slowly converted to Christianity; see also Richard Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Publishing, 1970), 1-4. In another study Ray Pritz argues that the use even of the term "Jewish-Christian" remains ineffective and cannot be universally applied because it refers to such a wide-ranging number of groups in the formative centuries of Christianity. According to Pritz, however, it is clear that in these early centuries of Christianity that there were many groups which had some connection to Jesus, the New Testament, and Jewish thought; see Ray Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period Until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press at the Hebrew University, 1988), 9-10. Yet another study sees "Jewish-Christian" as a useful term but admits the difficulty in assigning the term to ambiguous groups in the first several centuries of Christianity; see Matt Jackson-McCabe, "What's in a Name? The Problem of Jewish Christianity," in *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered*, ed. Matt Jackson-McCabe (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 7-39.

labeled the *Apostle of God* and the *Seal of the Prophets* on coins dating c.685-687 and in official documents of the eighth century.[28]

Even modern day Sabians[29] trace the main tenets of their faith to the Elchasaites/Sampsaeans. They teach their faith from a sacred book; they believe in one indivisible God; in power through baptisms; and that Adam first received God’s first prophetic message from an archangel.[30]

If one compares the tenets of Elchasai, as found in the various passages from Eusebius, Epiphanius, and Hippolytus, with those of Muhammad, there are parallels. An angel revealed the contents of a book that fell from heaven,[31] and only the author knew the intimate details of its contents, while all believers simply had to learn the text for prayer.[32] The Elchasaites were said to have used various non-Biblical texts, none of Paul’s letters, and believed that divine forgiveness was granted through a different manner than that which Christ had offered.[33]

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[28] Donner, Muhammad and the Believers, 76, 111-112, 205.

[29] Today this group is more often called Mandaeans; see E. von Dozel, ed., *Islamic Desk Reference* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 378.

[30] Valentinas Mite, “Iraq: Old Sabaean-Mandaean Community is Proud of Its Ancient Faith,” http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1053864.html. Accessed March 27, 2011.

[31] Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies,* 9:8, in *ANF*, 5:132.

[32] *Panarion*, 19:4:3, Williams, (1987), 46.

[33] Eusebius, *HE*, 6:38:3, Oulton, 92.

Saracens Who Lived as Jews

Epiphanius mentions that the Elchasaites, Ossaeans and Sampsaeans "lived not as Jews or Christians but as something in between."[34] The *Church History* of Sozomen helps clarify this statement. Writing on the Ishmaelites, Sozomen states:

> For this is the tribe that took its origin and name from Ishmael, the son of Abraham. And the ancients addressed them as Ishmaelites after their forefather. And wanting to get rid of their illegitimate dishonor they addressed themselves as Saracens as if they were descended from Sarah the wife of Abraham for the mother of Ishmael was of low birth status and she was a slave. And being of such descent they are drawn to circumcision like the Hebrews and keep away from the flesh of swine and guard themselves from many other things from the Gentile nations.[35]

Unsure of the etymology of the term Saracen, Sozomen provides the above explanation. A Greek rendering of the term *Saracen*, however, shows how the word came to be understood among Christian authors. Σάρρας is *Sarah*, and Κενός means *lacking, not having* or *being deprived of something.* From this perspective, then, *Saracen* referred to the Ishmaelites who were not Sarah's offspring, but the children of Abraham and the slave-girl Hagar. Although this is not the correct etymology of the term Saracen, the term continued to be understood in this fashion and it was used

[34] *Panarion*, 53:1:2-3, Williams, (1994), 70.

[35] Sozomen, *Church History*, 6:38:10-11 in Ερευνητικό έργο: *ΔΡΟΜΟΙ ΤΗΣ ΠΙΣΤΗΣ-ΨΗΦΙΑΚΗ ΠΑΤΡΟΛΟΓΙΑ*, *ΣΩΖΟΜΕΝΟΥ*: *ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑΣ.* (Πανεπιστήμιο Αιγαίου Τμήμα Πολιτισμικής Τεχνολογίας και Επικοινωνίας, 2006), 147.

in the same manner by John of Damascus when he critiqued Islam in the eighth century.[36]

Sozomen further explains how the Saracens were addicted to and corrupted by the superstitions of nearby tribes and nations and that the natural lapse of time

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[36] John of Damascus*, On Heresies: The Ishmaelites* in *Fathers of the Church*, 37, trans. Frederic Chase (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 153-160. It must be noted, however, that explaining *Saracen* as meaning "devoid of Sarah" is a strictly Christian rendering of the term. Although this particular Greek explanation of the term fits, the origin of the term remains in debate. Some studies suggest the term is related to the proto Arabic root *srkt*, meaning a type of association in close relation to a political federation. This study relied on the translation of a selected series of rock inscriptions, but the theory has been challenged. For this interpretation see David F. Graf and M. O'Connor, "The Origin of the Term Saracen and the Rawwafa Inscriptions," *Byzantine Studies* 4 (1977):52-66. For a look at the interworking of the Saracens and the Romans, see David F. Graf, "The Saracens and the Defense of the Roman Frontier," *BASOR* 229 (1978):1-26. More recent studies on the term Saracen suggested that it is related to the Arabic term *sharq*, *sharqi*, *sharqiyyin* meaning "east," or "easterners." Ptolemy mentioned a tribe named the *Sarakenoi* twice in his *Geography*, once as a tribe in the northern Sinai Peninsula and the other in northwest Arabia. Even though this a regional term, a tribe or tribes may have carried the name with them as they travelled and relocated. The second term that Saracen may be derived from is *sariq*, or *sariqin*, meaning "theft," "thieves," or "marauders." Studies suggest this term may have been applied by the sedentary Nabataean Arabs to "other" less-civilized Arabs that were outside the Nabataean kingdom of Petra. In this sense, the term was applied to Arabs who were nomadic and non-citizens of Rome and distinguished them from sedentary Arabs that were settled in Roman provincial territories. In Christian literature the term Saracen and barbarian seemed to apply to certain Arabs before their conversion to Christianity, while Hagarenes and Ishmaelites were applied to those after their conversion. For these interpretations see Irfan Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs: A Prolegomenon to the Study of Byzantium and the Arabs* (Wash. DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research, 1984), 123-142. For a look at similar studies, see I. Eph'al, "Ismael and Arab(s)': a Transformation of Ethnographical Terms," *JNES* 35 (1976):225-235. For the emergence of Saracens in Christian literature, Arabs and Saracens and religious cults of the Saracens, see Jan Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

simply corrupted the laws that were given to them by Ishmael.[37] Sozomen's description of the Saracens continues:

> And after this, some of them became kinsmen with the Jews by asking them of their origins and were brought back to a kin-relationship in a state of mind in which they were attached to Hebrew laws. And from that time until now many of them [Saracens] are living as Jews.[38]

Another example of the interaction among Jews, Christians, and Arabs is found in the worship at the Oak of Mambre.[39] According to the *Church History* of Socrates, Constantine built a church on the site after he destroyed the existing pagan altars.[40] A more detailed account again comes from the *Church History* of Sozomen who was himself a native of Palestine:

> Still now, here, at the Oak of Mambre, come those dancing in honor from Palestine and further from Phoenicia and Arabia. They annually attend this brilliant festival in the summer and great numbers gathered and, on account of the trading places, selling and buying merchandise. And all are drawn to the festival from surrounding areas. The Jews come because they boast of the patriarch Abraham, the pagans because of the presence of the angels, and by the Christians because the one born of a virgin for the salvation of the world openly displayed himself there and after a certain time appeared to a pious man. [41]

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[37] Sozomen, *HE*, 6:38:11-12, in *NPNF*, 2:375.
[38] Sozomen, *HE*, 6:38:13, in *NPNF*, 2:375.
[39] This is the traditional location of where Abraham entertained three angels in Genesis 13:18. The shrine mentioned here was built by Constantine and rested about twelve-hundred feet from Jerusalem. Eusebius argued that Christ himself appeared as one of these angels in the Genesis passage. Eusebius detailed the construction of the shrine and church at Mambre in his *Life of Constantine*, 3:51-53, in *NPNF*, 1:533.
[40] Socrates, *HE*, 1:18, in *NPNF*, 2:22.
[41] ΣΩΖΟΜΕΝΟΥ, *HE*, 2:4:2-3, 26.

Sozomen also indicated that "This place was honored with offerings of religious worship such as those giving thanks to the God of all and calling upon the angels and pouring an offering of wine and an offer of frankincense or a cow, a goat, a sheep or a cock."[42]

In addition to the points described in this chapter, another important channel for Muhammad's exposure to Christianity was that of desert monasticism. It remains essential, then, to detail the influence of the monks' contacts with Arabs.

[42] Sozomen, *HE*, 2:4:4, in *NPNF*, 2:261.

CHAPTER 3

MONKS, SARACENS, ARABS, AND ISHMAELITES

This chapter addresses the interaction that occurred between Christian monks and Arabs.[1] This will not be an exhaustive survey of monasticism in general but will instead focus on the circumstances that brought Christian monks into contact with Arabia.[2] Sources reveal that there was indeed plenty of interaction between Arab tribes and these desert Christians who "practiced philosophy" in the desert.[3] This contact, however, resulted more from tribal leaders seeking out miracles performed by these desert holy men than the frontier accepting Christian teaching. This relationship lasted sporadically until political conditions began to decline in 580.[4]

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[1] The terms "Saracens" and "Ishmaelites" were each applied to describe Arabs.

[2] For an introduction to monastic literature see William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: University Press, 2004).

[3] In his *Church History*, Sozomen used this term to describe the practice of desert asceticism. See Sozomen, *HE*, 1:12, 247, 248; 1:13, 248; 1:14, 251; 3:14, 291-293; 3:16, 295; 6:28, 365; 6:29, 365-367; 6:30, 368-369; 6:31, 369; 6:32, 369-370; 6:33, 370; 6:34, 370-371, in *NPNF*, vol. 2.

[4] Emperor Tiberius II invited Al-Mundhir of the Ghassan to Constantinople, and, as a sign of good favor, crowned him in 580 to have as an ally on the border with Persia. However, later that same year, General Maurice blamed Mundhir for a loss in Mesopotamia and the mysterious destruction of a key bridge leading into Persian territory. Al-Mundhir was exiled and his sons revolted; see Warwick Ball, *Rome in*

When analyzing the following hagiographical literature, however, one must keep in mind the complexity of this genre. The tales of these desert ascetics present their monks as holy heroes and champions of Christianity. Historians are faced with the task of sifting through the mythic and hagiographical elements and attempting to construct credible accounts.[5] These monastic accounts were the constructs of authors who tried to convey models to a specific community and aimed to demonstrate the holiness of these monks and their awe-inspiring asceticism. These stories almost certainly originated as oral reports and were meant to provide spiritual direction for their Christian audiences.[6] Some monastic literature may have been created as religious propaganda, but this does not undermine references that describe the reciprocal

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the East: The Transformation of an Empire (London: Routledge, 2000), 103; Philip Hitti, *History of Syria: Including Lebanon and Palestine* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004), 403-404; Kevin Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East* (London: British Museum Press, 2003), 74-75.

[5] There are, however, certain monastic tales that are corroborated by archaeological finds. One example is the monastic settlements overseen by Aspebetus that were destroyed by invading desert barbarians. See Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century: Vol.1 Part1: Political and Military History* (Dumbarton Oaks: Wash., D.C., 1995), 207.

[6] As monks heard the stories of their ascetic colleagues they wanted these tales preserved. Older monks repeated their spiritual exploits to younger generations of brothers who recorded then them in written collections. Events that had been seen and stories that had been heard were passed from monk to monk, cell to cell, and from community to community. See Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 78-87.

relationship that developed between Christian monks and Arabs.[7]

Christians Held Captive in Arabia

Two of the ways by which Christianity reached Arabia was through Christians fleeing persecution and monks who were seized and held captive.[8] One example of a Christian who fled into Arabia to avoid Roman persecution was Chaeremon:

> Χαιρήμων ἦν ὑπέργηρως τῆς Νείλου καλουμένης πόλεως ἐπίσκοπος. οὗτος εἰς τὸ᾽ Αράβιον ὄρος ἅμα τῇ συμβίῳ ἑαυτοῦ φυγών οὐκ ἐπανελήλυθεν οὐδὲ ἐδυνήθησαν ἰδεῖν οὐκέτι καίτοι πολλὰ διερευνησάμενοι οἱ ἀδελφοὶ οὔτε αὐτοὺς οὔτε τὰ σώματα. πολλοὶ δὲ οἱ κατ᾽ αὐτὸ τὸ Ἀραβικὸν ὄρος ἐξανδραποδισθέντες ὑπὸ βαρβάρων Σαρακηνῶν. ὧν οἱ μὲν μόλις ἐπὶ πολλοῖς χρήμασιν ἐλυτρῶθησαν οἵ δὲ μέχρι νῦν οὐδέπω.[9]

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[7] For hagiography and the genre of monastic literature see Andrew Louth, "Hagiography," and "The Literature of the Monastic Movement," In *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, ed., Frances Young, Lewis Ayres and Andrew Louth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 358-361, 373-380. The distinctness of Christian hagiography as a literary practice is addressed by Derek Krueger in *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). Kreuger investigates hagiography as devotion, asceticism and liturgy. With the emergence of asceticism, hagiography provided authors with a new means of literary expression. Although the genre itself was not new, hagiography became a distinct Christian literary practice. Hagiography allowed authors to reshape the traditional model of literary composition, and ascetic intellectual practices included literary composition. It was not enough for monks to simply read and learn saints' lives, they were expected to produce their own that accompanied writings on theology and philosophy.

[8] In this context the captors were Saracens and or Ishmaelites; see note 11 below.

[9] Eusebius, *HE*, 6:42:3-4, Oulton, 110. All that is known of Chaeremon is mentioned here.

> Chaeremon, who was exceedingly old, was bishop of the city named Nilopolis. This man fled with his wife into the Arabian Mountain, and when they did not return, although the brothers often searched thoroughly, they did not find them or their bodies. And many others were sold as slaves to the Arabian Mountain by the barbarian Saracens. On the one hand some were freed from slavery by the difficult process of a ransom, and on the other hand still others remain as slaves until now.[10]

A similar tale occurs in the *Life of Malchus, The Captive Monk,* written by Jerome about 390.[11] Malchus hailed from Nisibis,[12] and after he fled home to avoid marriage he headed to the desert region of Chalcis,[13] where he lived among a group of monks. In time he headed to Edessa with a caravan of about seventy over a highway that was patrolled by Saracens. On the way, however, Malchus was taken captive by a group of marauding Ishmaelites who shipped their captives off to various locations deep within the Arabian deserts.

Here Malchus' Ishmaelite captors forced him to be a shepherd for their growing flock and drove him into union with a female companion. Malchus revealed some of his

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[10] This took place during the seventh persecution of the Church c.250. Nilopolis was located on an island in the Nile about fifty miles from Memphis and the "Arabian Mountain" refers to the range of mountains separating Egypt from the Arabian Gulf. This may be somewhere in the Sinai Peninsula or further west closer to the Gulf of Aqaba. See *NPNF*, 1:285, note 5. For details of the possible routes see Pritchard, 57. In her pilgrimage Egeria mentioned the Mountains of Arabia as being north and east of the Jordan River. See *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage* in *Ancient Christian Writers*, 38, Johannes Quasten, et al, eds., (Mahwah, NJ: The Newman Press, 1970), 65, 188.

[11] Jerome, *The Life of Malchus*, *The Captive Monk*, in *NPNF*, 6:315-318.

[12] This is located in southeast Asia Minor near the Syrian border. Today it is known as Nusaybin.

[13] Located about fifty miles southeast of Antioch, Syria.

Christian faith to his captors when he explained why he could not marry a woman whose husband remained alive in captivity. According to Jerome, Malchus and the woman decided to live in a non-physical, spiritual union, and escaped their captors after ten days. They eventually arrived at a Roman camp and Malchus returned to his monastic life while his companion went on to a convent.

In the *Life of Paul, the First Hermit,* Jerome recorded that Paul also fled to the mountains to avoid the persecution of Decius[14] and there he remained in a cave inside a great mountain. The area where Paul lived was between Syria and the country of the Saracens, and many other monks also lived there in caves and cisterns, whose nourishment was palm leaves and muddy water.[15] According to Eusebius, however, the Arabian church found peace and rejoiced following the persecution of Decius,[16] but many Christians in Arabia were condemned and beheaded[17] under the later reign of Diocletian.[18]

[14] Decius ruled c.249-251.
[15] For the *Life of Paul*, see *NPNF*, 6:299-303.
[16] Eusebius, *HE*, 7:4:-5:2, Oulton, 138, 140.
[17] Eusebius, *HE*, 8:12:1, Oulton, 286.
[18] This persecution lasted from c.303 to 310.

Characteristics of Desert Monks

In the eyes of pilgrims and travelers, these monks possessed supernatural attributes.[19] They often had visions and angelic visitations, healed the sick, and fought the devil and his demons daily. The *Life of Shenoute* is but one example that reveals that in some cases monks memorized amazing amounts of scripture and were familiar with Biblical and non-Biblical texts alike.[20] These charismatic monks attracted others by their miracles and frequent recitation and teaching of Scripture.

Certain of these ascetic visions were met with the suspicion that they were the work of the devil and some people believed this was demonic delusion. One example saw the frequent visitations by the angel Gabriel as a temptation to pride.[21] Monks varied in their knowledge of Scripture; some knew it very well, while others refused to hold even any Biblically-based conversations with visitors.[22] The most quoted scriptures were *Psalms* and the

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[19] In her pilgrimage (c.381-384) Egeria mentions her frequent contact with the supernatural "holy men" that served as her guides. They lived in cells, often near a church, and certain monks near Mount Nebo in modern Jordan had a strong reputation as ascetics. These men knew the holy sites and their history very well. See *Egeria*, *Diary of a Pilgrimage*, 4, Quasten, 55; 5, Quasten, 56-58; 10, Quasten, 67.

[20] *The Life of Shenoute*, Introduction, Bell, 13, 15.

[21] Harmless, 241-242.

[22] Ibid., 244.

Gospel of Matthew and total memorization of the entire Old and New Testament was not uncommon.[23]

Ammonius, for example, was described as a learned scholar who knew the Old and New Testaments by heart as well as the works of various authors.[24] One Sarapion, highly literate, knew the Scriptures by heart and he never stopped discussing the scriptures as he wandered about.[25] In addition another monk, named Paphnutius, could explain the Old and New Testaments without having read them and he was so meek that he hid his prophetic gift.[26] Evagrius likewise experienced angelic visions and wrote several books after he received a gospel from an angel. He also wrote a book of one hundred chapters on prayers, another book on the subject of angels and demons, and eight other books on the eight evil spirits that monks could expect to encounter in the desert.[27] Some titles of these included *The Monk*, *On Ascetic Virtue*, *The Gnostic*, and others.[28]

Another example from among this ascetic literature is a letter that was sent to the Emperor Anastasius by certain

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[23] Ibid., 245-250.

[24] Palladius, *The Lausiac History*, trans. Robert T. Meyer (London: Longman's, Green and Co., 1965), Ammonius, 11:4, Meyer, 47. Palladius wrote this *History* when he travelled between the monasteries of Asia Minor, Palestine and Egypt. The *History* was dedicated to Lausus, a secretary for Theodosius II, (Byzantine Emperor 408-450). Palladius died c.430.

[25] *Lausiac History*, Sarapion, 37:1-2, Meyer, 105.

[26] *Lausiac History*, *Chronius and Paphnutius*, 47:3, Meyer, 125.

[27] *Lausiac History*, *Palladius*, 38:10, Meyer, 113.

[28] Socrates, *HE*, 4:23, in *NPNF*, 2:107.

pro-Chalcedonian desert monks who stated their uneasiness over the growing numbers of Monophysite bishops in Antioch.[29] The monks openly denounced anyone who dissented from the Council's decision by splitting up the divine-human union within Christ.

Pagan priests who converted to Christianity maintained their views on demons and produced types of magical papyri that focused on fighting demons.[30] These converted pagans were literate and familiar with pagan ritual, but they produced these texts as newly converted Christians.[31] Hence there was a new type of monk, one who had Christianized their pagan practices of fighting demons and added Biblical texts to their collections.[32] Monks who reported these experiences stressed their contact with higher beings with whom they were able to negotiate and whom they could manipulate.

These monks' social impact depended on their literary and rhetorical skills, which were their means of presenting their visions or their angel to the public.[33] They needed proficiency in words, phrases, and speech to communicate

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[29] Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, trans. R.M. Price (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1991), 57:152:16-157:23, 162-164.

[30] David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Harvard: University Press, 2006), 227.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 227-229.

[33] Ibid., 229.

their experiences to whomever would listen.[34] Some monks also claimed that they were assisted by a personal angel often who guided him in the use of words and phrases that the local population would understand. These angels were also believed to do the bidding of the monk, and a long-term angelic companion eventually became a type of all-purpose divine companion who revealed everything to the monk.[35]

Some literate monks were also seen as spokesmen for God and prophets of the end times. They modeled themselves after the Hebrew prophets,[36] and would sometimes collect their revelations into prophetic books.[37] In addition, Shenoute hid his prophetic persona and exposed the sins of a community, denounced its pagan gods, became an advocate for the poor and for social justice, and criticized the rich and powerful in society.[38] All together prophetic outsiders expressed these ideas to a new community or even to their own society.

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[34] One example is a certain James, a bishop in Arabia, who was said to have traveled extensively and acted as an ascetic-courier who delivered treaties to Persia to save Christians; see *The Syriac Chronicle: Known as that of Zachariah of Mitylene,* trans. F.J. Hamilton, E.W. Brooks (London: Methuen & Co., 1899), 314.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., 100-102.

[37] For an example of a monk who wrote such works, see below on Evagrius.

[38] Brakke, 102-103.

Sources of Monk-Arab Interaction

One of the most useful sources on monastic-Arab interaction, the *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* by Cyril of Scythopolis, relates the story of Terebon the Elder. As a young boy Terebon became paralyzed and his father, Aspebetus, spent a large fortune trying to heal his son. These attempts failed, however, and Aspebetus eventually turned to monks to restore the lad. According to the tale, as a tribal leader Aspebetus was originally an ally of Persia and was assigned as a chief of the Saracens by King Isigerdes I to capture any Christians who fled persecution and sought sanctuary within Roman borders. As Aspebetus witnessed the plight and suffering of the fleeing Christians, however, he began to assist them. Isigerdes eventually denounced him for these actions, so Aspebetus took his entire family and his wealth and joined the Romans. Through a treaty the Roman Eastern commander, Anatolius, named him chieftain of the Saracens in Arabia and an ally of Rome.[39]

[39] Isigerdes ruled as King of Persia 399-420. A recent study looks at the development of an Arab identity by analyzing their role under the Roman Empire as allies against Persia. This study also explores how this identity as an ally of Rome helped shape the Arabs to develop their distinct identity as Muslims; Greg Fisher, *Between Empires: Arabs, Romans, and Sassanians in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); see Geoffrey Greatrex and Samuel N.C. Lieu,

While camped in Arabia the young, paralyzed Terebon reported to his father, Aspebetus, that he had had a vision of a distant village, and Aspebetus commanded an entire entourage to seek the village that was home to the ascetics Euthymius[40] and Theoctistus.[41] Praying one night, Terebon made an oath to God that if he was healed, he would renounce his pagan worship and become a Christian. He promised to condemn the rites of magicians, astrologers, astronomers, and sorcerers, and then saw Euthymius in a vision. According to the tale Euthymius instructed Terebon to travel twelve miles from Jerusalem to a place near Jericho to be healed.

Terebon arrived at Euthymius' cell and was healed, and, as a result of the miracle, the crowd of Saracens that had accompanied Euthymius immediately accepted Christ. Euthymius constructed a font in a nearby cave and first baptized Aspebetus, who was renamed Peter, then his brother-in-law Maris, and finally Terebon. The new converts then stayed with the two monks for forty days and were instructed in the word of God. Cyril relates that they departed no longer Ishmaelites but now considered

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The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars (New York: Routledge, 2002), 37.

40 He lived c. 377-473.

41 Theoctistus died c. 451.

descendants of Sarah and heirs to the Abrahamic promise through their baptism. Maris stayed at the monastery the rest of his life and donated his fortune to extend the area surrounding Euthymius' cell. News of the miracle spread to surrounding tribes and provinces, and many sought to be healed by Euthymius.[42]

Peter (formerly Aspebetus) returned to Euthymius with great numbers of Saracen men, women and children who were eager to hear the word of Christian salvation. They were baptized; a number of Saracens built cisterns, a bake-house, cells, and an oratory for the monastery. The account adds that the Saracens "who had formerly been wolves of Arabia but had then joined the rational flock of Christ begged to remain near him (Euthymius)."[43] Euthymius,

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[42] *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, *Terebon*, 10:18:15-21:19, Price, 14-17.

[43] Ibid., *The Tents and the Saracens*, 15:24:20-21, 20. For the later Arab involvement in church politics see Irfan Shahid, "Arabica: The Conference of Ramla A.D. 524," *JNES* 23, no. 2 (Apr., 1964):115-131; Irfan Kawar, "The Arabs in the Peace Treaty of A.D. 561," *Arabica* 3, no. 2 (May 1956):181-213. One of the more well-known Arabs hired as a phylarch was Amorkesos and for his visit to Leo I in 473 see C.D. Gordon, *The Age of Attila: Fifth Century Byzantium and the Barbarians* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960), 14-16. For a look at the island that Amorkesos controlled see Philip Mayerson, "The Island of Iotabe in the Byzantine Sources: A Reprise," *BASOR* 287 (Aug., 1992):1-4 and by the same author, "A Note of Iotabe and Several Other Islands in the Red Sea," *BASOR* 298 (May, 1995):33-35. For the working relationship between the Arabs and the Romans also see Mayerson, "Saracens and Romans: Micro-Macro Relationships," *BASOR* 274 (May, 1989):221-235. For political events involving Arabs and Constantinople see Alexander A. Vasiliev, "Notes on some Episodes Concerning the Relations between the Arabs and the Byzantine Empire from the Fourth to the Sixth century," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9 (1956):306-316. For some Arabs who were hired

however, loved his solitude and suggested that the Saracens instead build a church and pitch their tents near him.[44] Their needs were so great that Euthymius assigned them a priest and deacons who baptized and instructed the tribesmen who continued to arrive. Those who were baptized settled there and formed several more surrounding encampments, which forced Euthymius to request a bishop for the area. This post was given to Peter, formerly Aspebetus and father of Terebon, and he became the first Bishop of the Encampments. The *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* records that "One could witness a multitude of Saracen barbarians coming to the great Euthymius, receiving baptism and being taught to worship the one who is God over all."[45] Later, as a married man, Terebon brought his barren wife to Euthymius and she was healed and eventually bore three sons.

Euthymius influenced the type of Christianity to which Peter and his Arab followers subscribed. Euthymius strongly opposed non-Nicene doctrines[46] and expressed a strong belief in the unity of the Trinity in a glorified, indivisible

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by the Byzantines, see Irfan Kawar, "Arethas Son of Jabalah," *JAOS* 75, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1955):205-216.

[44] Remains can still be seen here today between Khan el-Ahmar and Wadi Mukelik, about six miles east of Jerusalem.

[45] *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, *The Tents and the Saracens*, 15:25:8-11, Price, 20-21.

[46] Ibid., 26:39:24-41:4, 36-37.

Godhead, inseparable in essence. The Saracens who accepted Christianity through Peter and Euthymius were exposed to Nicene Christianity. However, which specific doctrines they accepted and understood cannot be determined.[47] After the death of Peter, his successor John brought news of the decision of Chalcedon[48] to Euthymius, and Euthymius accepted that profession of faith. Not all monks, however, subscribed to Chalcedonian orthodoxy.

Another Arab who sought out Euthymius was the archimandrite[49] Elias. Cyril reported that these archimandrites frequently stayed in the deserts on the west shores of the Dead Sea. Elias built his own cell near Jericho where he eventually founded a community.[50] Elias spent thirty years there and after his death was replaced by another Arab, Stephen, who held his position for twenty-one years.[51]

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[47] Cyril, a pro-Nicene source, recorded these events.

[48] This council was held in 451 and concluded that Jesus was perfect God and perfect man in two indivisible natures. For this council see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 263-266; see Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787)* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 170-206.

[49] This is a Greek term meaning “ruler” or “head” of “an enclosed space.” In this case it this refers to Elias being head of a monastery or monasteries.

[50] *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, *Martyrius and Elias*, 32:51:5-19, Price, 47.

[51] *Lives of the Monks of Palestine, Caesarius, Leonitus, and Nilus*, 47:68:10-11, 48:69:1-2, Price, 65.

The important role of a Christian holy man within an Arab community is also seen in the story of Thalabas.[52] As a second-generation Christian Saracen, Thalabas explained to two Saracen chieftains that one of their companions had been taken over by demonic convulsions because he broke a cistern that had belonged to the late Euthymius. Thalabas laid the demoniac next to the tomb of Euthymius, and he was immediately healed. The man was so moved by the event that he was baptized a few days later. A similar tale involved a Saracen named Argob who brought his son to be healed near the tomb of Euthymius.[53]

These stories demonstrate that even pagan Arabs were awed by the power of monks and that they showed them respect and sought healing from them. Thalabas was described as among the descendants of those who had been baptized by Euthymius,[54] indicating that the faith was seen by some tribes as more than a quick fix for an immediate problem.[55] The Arab tribes that converted hoped that their Christian faith would give them the same power as the monks

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[52] *Lives of the Monks of Palestine, The Saracen*, 51:75:1-29, Price, 73; *The Son of Argob*, 53:76:6-13, Price, 74.

[53] Argob was also the name of the region Trachonitis, which was north of the Decapolis. This reference to Argob the Saracen may refer to the area from which he came; see George Robinson, "The 'Ancient Circuit of Argob,'" *The Biblical World* 20, no. 4 (1902):248-259.

[54] See note 52 above.

[55] The strongest example is the Tanukh tribe that remained Christian through the Umayyad period. See Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Wash., D.C. Dumabarton Oaks, 2006), 455-456.

who had baptized them and would protect them in their work and daily life.

The *Life of Sabas* reveals still more interaction between monks and Arabs.[56] On one occasion Sabas gave four hungry Saracens his own food and they returned to his cave several days later with a generous supply for him of their own food.[57] Similarly, another group of Saracens returned every few days to give Sabas provisions because he had granted them access to his cave near Siloam.[58] There is also a colorful tale that has Sabas and two companions witness the earth open and swallow six Saracens who were attempting to capture them.[59]

Sabas became personally involved in church politics when he visited the Emperor Justinian[60] and his wife,

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[56] *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, *Sabas*, 13:96:13-76:182, Price, 105-190.

[57] Ibid., 13:96:13-19, 105.

[58] This is located just south of Jerusalem.

[59] *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, *The Saracen Incursion*, 14:97:3-18, Price, 106.

[60] He ruled as Byzantine Emperor 527-565. When the two met, Justinian also made the following offer to Sabas: pray for me and the empire and your monasteries will receive all the necessary financial support they need. Sabas replied that their real revenue was already with the Lord, but there were a few things the monks of Palestine wanted. These include a remission of taxes, a rebuilding of destroyed churches, assistance for Palestinian Christians, the building of a hospital in Jerusalem, and completion of the Church of the Mother of God. Lastly, Sabas requested that Justinian build a fort in the desert to defend the monasteries against the invasive, troubling Saracens. Sabas also pleaded with the emperor to extinguish remnants of remaining non-imperial Christianity for they had taken over a number of desert monastic communities. Justinian wasted no time beginning these projects and in time they were completed. Sabas died about the year 530 and this

Theodora. When he met Sabas, the emperor received the petition put together by the monks and then escorted the desert ascetic to meet the empress. Sabas, as politically incorrect as possible, refused to answer Theodora's request that he pray for her to have a child. He wisely disguised his prayer three times as a blessing for the empire. After the empress left, Sabas told his companions that no Monophysite womb will ever produce fruit.[61]

Theological division grew following the death of Sabas and more and more monks followed "the plague of Origen."[62] In 543 the emperor Justinian called the Synod of Constantinople which condemned such monks and many of them were expelled from the monasteries in Judea. Even more were expelled following the Fifth Ecumenical Council[63] and a large number of expelled monks fled east and south from Judea.[64]

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brought together great crowds of monks and laypeople from the surrounding areas.

[61] *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, *Petition to the Emperor*, 152:20-158:10, *Sabas at the Court of Justinian*, 173:15-174:10, Price, 162-167, 182-183.

[62] This term is used in *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, *The Origensits Assemble at the New Laura*, 84:189:10:15, , Price, 198.

[63] For the events of this Council in 553 see Davis, 207-256. For an updated study of church councils see Norman Tanner, *The Councils of the Church: A Short History* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001). On Origen and Justinian see Terry L. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 124-125.

[64] Another important figure in Monophysite-Arab relations was Theodore of Arabia. His jurisdiction included all the desert regions of Arabia including Jerusalem in Palestine. He lived among the Ghassan tribe and although he carried out few ordinations, he presided over the local

These examples display an interdependent relationship that existed between certain desert monks and Arab tribesmen. The population of the Judean desert consisted mostly of Arab of shepherds and tradesmen, who fostered a mutual support with the monks. Several of the cases cited above had Saracen-Arabs seek out these holy men for cures and miracles, and when these came, the Arabs often returned, providing the monks with food and supplies, or they became frequent visitors to a certain tomb or cell.[65] Some Arab tribes even carried grain shipments and other goods to the monks they had befriended. As the Judean monasteries grew, however, they became more integrated into the cities of Jericho and Jerusalem and came to depend more on urban patrons and less on rural Arab tribes. None of these sources, however, involve these monks seeking out Arab villagers to spread the Gospel; this was not the aim of monastic asceticism. Instead, it was the Arab travelers who sought out the holy men or merely encountered them throughout the desert. Arab converts to Christianity were influenced by the powers of these monks, and developed a

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Arab-Monophysite church. See John Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine 314-631* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 187-190.

[65] Binns, 111.

superstitious attraction to these men who seemed to control the traditional abode of demonic forces.

In his *Church History* Sozomen records how an Ishmaelite tribe accepted Christianity after their leader experienced a miracle:

> Some of them [Saracens] were brought to Christianity not long before the reign of the present king [Theodosius II, r.408-450]. They shared in the faith of Christ by means of associating with the priests and monks living nearby in the neighboring deserts philosophizing and performing wondrous deeds. And it is even said that at that time a whole tribe under the chief Zocomus converted to Christianity and were baptized in the following manner.[66]

The account continues in 6:38:15-16:

> The man was childless and went to a monk of certain fame to speak with him and bitterly lament about such misfortune. For I believe that for many of the Saracens and all other barbarians it is important to have children. And the monk encouraged him to grow in confidence and sent him away saying that he would have a son if he would profess faith in Christ. And when God's deed confirmed the promise and when a son was born to him, Zocomus and his followers were initiated. From that time it is said this tribe became prosperous and grew in number and was formidable to the Persians and to the other Saracens. In this case, such was the way of life I have learned of the Saracens concerning the origin of their conversion to Christianity and concerning their first bishop.[67]

Inscriptions found in Arabia also provide information on the number of monks who came from the area. In Sobota, east of the Dead Sea in the Arabian desert, twenty-nine memorial inscriptions include the month and year and the age of

[66] ΣΩΖΟΜΕΝΟΥ, 6:38:14, in *ΠΑΤΡΟΛΟΓΙΑ*, 148.
[67] ΣΩΖΟΜΕΝΟΥ, 6:38:15-16, in *ΠΑΤΡΟΛΟΓΙΑ*, 148.

death of monks in the area.[68] A monastic cemetery in Choziba, west of Jericho, contains two hundred and thirteen inscriptions naming monks from Arabia, India (South Arabia?) and Persia.[69] These inscriptions date from the fifth to tenth centuries with the majority dating to the sixth and seventh. Monks fled ever deeper into Arabia during the Muslim conquests, and the *Life of George of Choziba*, written in 631, details the steady flow of monks fleeing into Arabia to escape the approaching Persian army.[70] Upon returning from Arabia after the Persian conquest of Palestine, one Nicomedes saw the roads littered with the bodies of fellow monks, said to have been slaughtered by the thousands.[71]

It is also important to discuss the Syrian model of asceticism because according to Christian and Muslim sources, Muhammad encountered monks in his travels to Syria[72] so this would have been the type of monasticism he encountered.

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[68] Binns, 74.

[69] A.M. Schneider, "Das Kloster de Theotokos zu Choziba im Wadi el Kelt," *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und für Kirchengeschichte* 39 (1931): 197-232, 317-329.

[70] Binns, 55.

[71] Ibid., 245.

[72] *Life of Muhammad*, *The Story of Bahira*, 115-119, Guillaume, 79-81; and *Life of Muhammad*, *The Apostle of God Marries Khadija*, 119- 121, Guillaume, 82-83. For the Christian sources, see Barbara Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahira: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam* (Brill: Leiden, 2009), 203-210; Barbara Roggema, "A Christian Reading of the Qur'an: The Legend of Sergius-Bahira and

Syrian Ascetics and Arabs

The Syrian model was unique in the realm of Christian monasticism, for it was based on the apostolic practices found in the New Testament.[73] Most Syrian[74] monasteries appear to have been in open-air areas near the major trade routes because these monks sought interaction with travelers.[75]

The source of the Syrian monks' charismatic power was their voluntary humility and extreme poverty.[76] Some

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Its Use of Qur'an and Sira," in *Syrian Christians Under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, David Thomas, ed., (Boston: Brill, 2001), 59-63; Richard Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 13 (1898):190-192; 14 (1899-1900):216-222. For his translations Gottheil used *Ms Sachau* 87, foll.48 for the Syriac Bahira in *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 13 (1898); and *Ms Paris Arabe* 215 for the Arabic Bahira in *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 14 (1899-1900) and *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 15 (1901).

[73] Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, trans. R.M. Price (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1985), *Introduction*, xix-xx; this *History* covers c.393-466.

[74] In his *History*, Theodoret mentions the cities of Antioch, Cyrrhus, Chalcis, Teleda, Nisibis, Caesarea, Aelia and Nicerte. Ancient Syria was divided into an upper and lower section. Lower Syria, known as Coele-Syria (Hollow Syria), was located between the Libanus and Antilibanus mountain ranges. Damascus was the ancient capital city. Rome divided Syria into two provinces. Syria Prima, and Syria Secunda. Antioch was the capital of Syria Prima and Aleppo the major city. Syria Secunda was divided into two sections, Phoenicia Prima and Phoenicia Secunda. The cities that are mentioned by Theodoret fall into these arrangements. For these divisions of Syria, see Butcher, 19-32.

[75] Ibid.

[76] In the introduction of his the *History of the Monks of Syria*, xx-xxiii, R. M. Price argues that Syrian asceticism can be traced to the canonical *Gospel of Matthew* and the non-canonical *Acts of the Apostle Thomas*. In the *Acts*, Thomas is presented as the twin brother of Jesus, and throughout the text he performed miracles and other deeds in the name of Christ. For the accounts of Thomas, see "*Acts of the Holy Apostle Thomas*," trans. Alexander Walker, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol.8 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 4th printing, 2004), 8:533-549. See Stephen Neil, *A History of Christianity in India* (Cambridge: University Press, 1984), 28. The following is the description of

believed this ascetic behavior provided them direct access to God and allowed them to manifest visibly divine grace in their spiritual lives.[77] Through their acts they believed they received the Holy Spirit and shared their privileged knowledge of God with people and provided spiritual guidance.[78] A brief look at some of the characteristics of some of these Syrian ascetics reveals the type of monasticism concurrent with Muhammad's merchant trips to Syria.

James of Nisibis was an ascetic who spent his time in caves and was believed to possess prophetic knowledge and the ability to work miracles. He was intent on destroying the remaining elements of idol worship and was considered by some to be a new type of Moses. He even attended the Council of Nicea.[79]

Thomas's ascetic lifestyle: "He goes around the cities and the districts, and if he has anything he gives all to the poor, and teaches one new God, and heals the diseased, and drives out demons, and does many other extraordinary things…he continually prays and fasts, and eats only bread with salt, and his drink is water, and he carries one coat . . . and he takes nothing from any one, but gives to others even what he has," in *ANF*, 8:539. One can see, then, with Thomas' story as a guide, that Syrian ascetics focused on mission work and miracles in their lives.

[77] *Lives of the Monks of Syria*, *Introduction*, xxxiv; see Daniel Cancer, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 83-84; see S.P. Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen* 20 Fasc. 1 (Apr., 1973):1-19.

[78] Cancer, 109-110.

[79] *History of the Monks of Syria*, *James of Nisibis*, 1:1-14, Price, 12-20. For a collection of the literature on the Council of Nicea, see Frances M. Young and Andrew Teal, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to*

Marcianus came from a well-to-do family and often read the divine oracles[80] in his desert cell and chanted the Psalms. One night, one of his followers reportedly witnessed a bright light coming from his head, "revealing the composition of letters in the divine oracles."[81] Marcianus was seen searching for the divine will in a book that he was holding.[82]

Eusebius of Teleda, near Antioch, sat and read a history of the gospels to crowds while a follower of his interpreted and explained.[83] An Ishmaelite named Abba became a follower of James the Persian and began a desert life with one Marosas.[84] Palladius and his brother monks often went to trade fairs at which the opportunity existed to spread the Gospel to traders from all over the ancient world.[85] In like fashion, Aphrahat, a Persian who moved to Edessa, attracted large crowds that came to hear his

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the Literature and the Its Background, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2010).

[80] *History of the Monks of Syria*, *Marcianus*, 3:1-3:23, Price, 37-46. This must refer to the Old Testament Prophets or perhaps Psalms.

[81] Ibid., 3:6, 39.

[82] Ibid.; even later, Muslim historians were not hesitant to add that Muhammad himself was said to exude a light from the moment of his birth; see Michael Cook, *Muhammad*, 14. Also, according to the *Life of Muhammad*, the Prophet's mother related "how when she was pregnant with him [Muhammad] a light went out from her, which illuminated the castles of Bosra in Syria;" *Life of Muhammad*, *The Birth of the Apostle and His Suckling*, 106, Guillaume, 72.

[83] *History of the Monks of Syria*, *Eusebius of Teleda*, 4:1-6, Price, 49-52.

[84] Ibid., 4:12, 55.

[85] Ibid., *Palladius*, 7:2, 69.

"divine oracles" preached in a "semi-barbarian language."[86] A certain Abraham hid his monastic character by taking the guise of a traveling merchant and became a bishop in Mesopotamia.[87] Muhammad himself is said to have listened to Christian sermons by bishop Quss of Najran while he attended a merchant festival near Mecca.[88]

One of the best known Syrian monks who had contact with Arabs was Simeon Stylites.[89] His fame eventually spread as far as Persia and Ethiopia and he welcomed Ishmaelite and Homerite visitors.[90] It is said that tens of thousands of pagan Ishmaelites became illuminated by Simeon as he stood atop his pillar.[91] Hundreds reportedly came at a time and renounced their ancestral ties to idol worship with a frenzied enthusiasm. In addition, they smashed idols and accepted new laws that prohibited the further eating of animal flesh.[92]

Theodoret of Cyrrhus stated that he was a witness to Simeon's effect on his visitors and added that the

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[86] Ibid., *Aphrahat*, 8:2, 72.
[87] Ibid., *Abraham*, 7:2, 120.
[88] Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965), 162.
[89] *History of the Monks of Syria*, *Symeon*, 26:1-28, Price, 160-171.
[90] The Homerites came from what is modern Yemen, which suggests that Simeon had visitors come from this distant location. For the history of the Himyar kingdom see Robert Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 45-55; see *History of the Monks of Syria*, Price, *Symeon*, 26:11, 165-166.
[91] *History of the Monks of Syria*, *Symeon*, 26:13, Price, 166.
[92] Ibid., *Symeon*, 26:13, 167.

Ishmaelites were nearly out of control when they arrived to seek their blessing from Simeon. Each tribe jostled its way to the head of the line and demanded that their chief be blessed first, which forced monks to try to control the heated arguments and unruly crowds.[93] Simeon also blessed certain personal objects tribesmen brought from their sheikhs which they believed became thereby imbued with certain powers. One tribal leader abandoned his pagan beliefs and confessed belief in the Trinity when he was cured of paralysis,[94] while another, already believing in Christ, grew in his faith after the chicken he was forbidden to eat turned to stone.[95]

Arabs were drawn to Simeon to such an extent that "there was no end to the Arabs and their kings and chiefs who received baptism there and believed in God, and confessed the Messiah, and at the word of the Blessed One also built churches among their tents!"[96] A band of Ishmaelites were so distraught when Simeon died that they

[93] Ibid., *Symeon*, 26:14, 167.
[94] Ibid., *Symeon*, 26:16, 167-168.
[95] Ibid., *Symeon*, 26:18, 168.
[96] "The Life of Simeon Stylites, A Translation of the Syriac Text in Bedjan's *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, Vol. IV," trans. Frederick Lent, *JAOS* 35 (1915): 136. It should be noted that in his *Religious History*, Theodoret of Cyrrhus only recorded miracles that Simeon worked among Arabs. See *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*, Robert Doran, trans. (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1989), 40; Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa*, *PG* 82, J.P. Migne, ed. (Paris: 1864): col.1283-1522.

attempted to steal his body and return with it to their tents.[97]

On another occasion a sterile Ishmaelite queen sought a miracle from Simeon. Unable to visit a monk in person, she sent a group of officials who voiced her plea. She eventually conceived and gave birth to a son, who was later taken before Simeon, who said he simply watered the seed of life with his tears.[98]

Moses and Queen Mauia of the Saracens

One example of Christian monasticism and Arab tribal dependency involved the Saracen Queen Mauia and a local ascetic named Moses. According to the church histories by Socrates and Sozomen, Mauia was an Arab leader who recognized the importance of Christianity among her people as the factor for creating political relations with Rome.[99]

According to the sources, the death of Mauia's husband annulled a standing treaty with Rome, which led her to lead a revolt against the Empire. She acted quickly and took control of her tribal federation to assert her authority

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[97] *History of the Monks of Syria*, *James of Cyrrhestica*, Price, 148, note 6.

[98] Ibid., *Symeon*, 26:21, 170. For the pillar movement in general see David Frankfurter, "Stylites and Phallobates: Pillar Religions in Late Antique Syria," *Vigiliae Christianae* 44, no. 2 (Jun., 1990): 168-198.

[99] These accounts are found in Socrates, *HE*, 4:36, in *NPNF*, 2:116 and Sozomen, *HE*, 4:38:1-10, in *NPNF*, 2:374.

and to validate her position. When Rome realized they could not defeat Mauia on the battlefield, they attempted to pacify her through a standard treaty of subordination.

However, Mauia had the boldness to reject Rome's offer for peace and she counter-offered the emperor her own demands. The grounds for her peace with Rome were not political but religious, for she demanded that a local monk, Moses, be named as bishop for her people. Moses was subsequently ordained by the Nicene Christian clergy whom Mauia protected after they had fled from the Arians in Egypt.

As a result of Mauia's actions, Rome was compelled to make peace on Mauia's conditions and the conflict ended. As a result of her military prowess, her political maneuvering, and her religious convictions, Mauia became so essential to the Empire that her Arian enemy, the Emperor Valens, later pleaded for her forces to defend Constantinople against the advancing Goths.

Monks in the Qur'an

The Qur'an contains a few references to monks that reflect the relationship and attitude between Muhammad and these Christian men of the desert. Sura 5:82 indicates a positive view of Christian monks: "You will certainly find

the nearest in friendship to those who believe [Muslims] to be those who say we are Christians; this is because there are priests and monks among them and because they do not behave proudly."

That the views changed is shown by other verses that view Christian monks negatively and rebukes them. For example Sura 9:31 states, "They [Christians] have taken their doctors of law and their monks for lords besides God," while 9:34 declares, "O you who believe! Most surely many of the doctors of law and the monks eat away the property of men falsely, and turn them from God's way."[100] Similar views are found in Sura 57:27: "And as for monasticism, they innovated it--we did not prescribe it to them--only to seek God's pleasure, but they did not observe it with its due observance, so we gave to those of them who believed their reward and most of them are transgressors."[101]

[100] Most Muslim commentators agree that this does not mean that Christians took scribes and monks actually for gods; the meaning is that some Christians followed them blindly and attached to them a divine dignity which is only reserved for God. Also, the acquisition of wealth is not disallowed, but only the amassing of wealth for any use besides that which is for the welfare of humanity. See Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Holy Qur'an with English Translation and Commentary* (Plain City, OH: Lahore Inc., 2002), 405, 407.

[101] This verse emphasizes that monasticism is not prescribed in the Qur'an. Christians are believed to have invented the institution of monasticism to seek only God's divine pleasure. Muslims, therefore, were instructed to avoid practicing monasticism because it led to the amassing of wealth and interrupted moral pursuits in their life.

These Qur'anic verses offer varying attitudes towards Christian monks. One commended the ascetics and even considered monks as the nearest friends of Muslims, while the other verses condemned monks as inventors of monasticism. These verses also suggest the changeable associations Muhammad had with monks and how his interaction with these groups may have influenced his revelations, or his spiritual direction.[102]

According to the *Life of Muhammad*, ascetic pursuits were not uncommon among pagans of pre-Muslim Mecca. The *Life* records that Mount Hira, which overlooked Mecca, was home to Zaid ibn Amr, a type of monotheist who spent his life searching for the correct expression of the Abrahamic religion. He was not a Christian or a Jew and was banished from Mecca for his anti-pagan, pro-monotheistic views and eventually retreated to Mount Hira for prayer and

[102] Monks and hermits continued to play an important role in the formation of Muslim law because they remained at the center of the doctrine of Jihad. Certain *Hadith* of the tenth and eleventh centuries clearly instructed to leave monks and hermits in peace, while other interpretations included them among the groups to be killed; see Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publishers, 1996), 31-34. According to Muqatil ibn Sulayman (d.767), an early biographer of Muhammad, these monk verses referred to forty monks who maintained the original uncorrupted religion of Jesus. They lived during Muhammad's life and thirty-two lived in Ethiopia and the other eight in Syria. The monk Bahira, who mentioned in this study, was named by Ibn Sulayman as having resided in Syria. For this account, see Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: Abd al-Jabbar and the Critique of Christian Origins* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 89.

reflection. Zayd was one of four initial Hanifs that sought to break from the traditional pagan practices of Mecca.[103]

In his travels Zaid spent time asking Christian monks and Jewish rabbis about *Hanifiya*,[104] and the practice and belief of true monotheists. Zaid found a monk in Syria who assured him that Muhammad was to come and bring the proper form of monotheistic religion; however Zaid died on his return journey and never lived to witness the Muslim movement under Muhammad.[105] This, however, is another example of a hagiographical tale that has to be measured against similar literature of this genre.

In a Muslim context, Muhammad used the term *hanif* to link himself to Abraham, who was neither Jew nor Christian, but the first true monotheist.[106] The Jews had had Moses, the Christians had Jesus, and now the Arabs had Muhammad, who linked himself to Abraham and established himself as the *Seal of the Prophets*.[107]

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[103] Waraqa ibn Naufal became a learned Christian scholar; Ubaydullah ibn Jahsh left being Muslim and became a Christian when he migrated to Abyssinia; Uthman ibn al-Huwayrith went to work for the Byzantine court; Zayd ibn Amr accepted neither Judaism nor Christianity; *Life of Muhammad*, *Four Men Who Broke with Polytheism*, 143-144, Guillaume, 99.

[104] This term applies to Abraham in the Qur'an as a *hanif*, or one inclined to follow the true faith. It also translates as "friend," in the sense that one who follows Allah is a faithful friend. For these verses see Qur'an 2:135-6, 3:67, 3:95, 4:125, 6:161, 10:105, 16:120, 123, 22:31, 30:30 and 98:5.

[105] In the Qur'an the term *hanif* was used to describe Abraham and reassure that he was *not* a polytheist.

[106] Sura 4:125.

[107] Sura 33:40.

Muhammad and the Monk Bahira

In the context of this discussion of interaction with Christian monks was a monk identified as Bahira or Sargis Bahira.[108] Muslim and Christian traditions each developed a distinct interpretation of this event. The Muslim sources expanded on the account found in the *Life of Muhammad* and used it as an opportunity to construct an event that had a Christian ascetic identify Muhammad as a prophet.[109] The Christian sources were polemic and produced versions that had Bahira provide Muhammad a religious education that included portions of the Qur'an.[110] The Muhammad-Bahira account reflects the centuries-long interaction between monks and Arabs and was written during a time when local

[108] In some sources he is identified as Sargius Bahira, Sergius Bahira or simply Bahira.

[109] *Life of Muhammad*, *The Story of Bahira*, 115-117, Guillaume, 79-81. In the account a young Muhammad met Bahira during a trade expedition to Bostra, Syria. The passages say that the Christian monk Bahira gained his knowledge from a book that he had kept in his cell from generation to generation. As the caravan approached, Bahira noticed that a cloud followed Muhammad and that a tree bent its branches and shaded him when he rested. Bahira eventually identified a physical mark of prophecy on Muhammad that the monk knew from his own prophetic books. Certain parts of the passage in the *Life* imply that Bahira traveled back to Mecca with Muhammad because the monk protected Muhammad from Zurayr and Tammam and Daris, who were people of the scriptures who wanted to harm Muhammad. Again, however, this may be a reference to Jews and Christians, "people of the scriptures" who did not acknowledge Muhammad's prophethood. The names of these three men suggest that one was a Syrian, another Persian, and the other a Jew, or, in the context of the "people of the book," a Christian, a Jew and a Persian Zoroastrian.

[110] Richard Gottheil, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, 14 (1899-1900):222.

Christians remained uncertain regarding the initial Arab conquests.

Al-Tabari relied on the *Life of Muhammad* for his interpretation of the event,[111] and later Christian versions in Syriac and Arabic added their own features. Written from a Christian perspective, these versions pointed to Bahira as the catalyst for Muhammad's prophetic career.

The common theme in the Christian accounts of the Bahira narrative is that Muhammad was unable to grasp fully the core Christian beliefs and as a result started his own religious movement based on what he had learned from Bahira.[112] Moreover, these Christian accounts of the Bahira legend were written with the intention of demonstrating that the Qur'an originated in Christian circles,[113] and to discredit the prophetic career of Muhammad and his revelations.[114] The Bahira story could also be classified as a piece of literature that was meant to strengthen the confidence of Christians living under Muslim rule.[115] Moreover, the compositions of the Muhammad-Bahira tales

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[111] According to Tabari, Muhammad made the trip when he was nine years old. Al-Tabari, *The History, Vol. VI: Muhammad at Mecca*, trans. W. Montgomery Watt and M.V. McDonald (New York: State University Press, 1988), 44-45.

[112] For this account see Gottheil, *ZA*, 17 (1903):141-146, 150-160.

[113] Richard Gottheil, *ZA*, 14 (1899-1900):222.

[114] Ibid., 216-222.

[115] Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: University Press, 2007), 39.

were contemporary with the rise of initial Muslim literature and demonstrate the need that each society felt to counteract the history of the other.[116]

In addition to the *Life of Muhammad* and the accounts from Tabari, there are Syriac and Arabic versions of the Muhammad-Bahira encounter. These date from c.800 and are contemporary with the authoritative Muslim histories and biographies that presented the same material so any clear

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[116] There is also the possibility that the Sargis Bahira account was influenced by the shrine of Saint Sergius in Rusafa, Syria. Local Arabs became the custodians of his relics after his death, and because of a series of healings attributed to Sergius, the name became common among Arab Christians. For a detailed account of Sergius, see Elizabeth Key Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius Between Rome and Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). For more on Sergius and Arabs, see Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century: Vol. 1, part 2: Ecclesiastical History* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 949-952, 953, 955; Irfan Shahid, "Byzantium in South Arabia," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 33 (1979):85-87; Jonathan Bardill, "The Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople and the Monophysite Refugees," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 54 (2000):1-11. Another view is that as a young officer Justinian served in Rusafa (Sergiopolis) and became familiar with and impressed by the social strength of the saintly cult. For this position, see Brian Croke, "Justinian, Theodora and the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 60 (2006):25-63. Later sources identified Sergius Bahira as a former Jacobite deacon from Antioch who befriended Muhammad after his expulsion from the Church. For this see Stefano Mula, "Muhammad and the Saints: The History of the Prophet in the 'Golden Legend,'" *Modern Philology* 101, no. 2 (Nov., 2003):175-188. The Bahira story remained important in Muslim circles because later authors continued their attempts to pinpoint his origin and the circumstances of his meeting Muhammad. For example, sources from the mid-ninth century had other monks besides Bahira recognize Muhammad's prophethood, including two traveling abbots and another who recognized Muhammad as a prophet before he reached the age of nine. In the mid-eleventh century Al-Mawardi presented similar tales, and Al-Wahidi had Bahira coming from Ethiopia. Ibn Qutayba mentioned Bahira as one of the three greatest people on the earth; Al-Masudi had the monk coming from Bahrain; and Al-Suhayli believed that Bahira was a Jewish rabbi. Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-tubaqat al-kabir*, 2 vols. trans. S. Moninul Haq (India: Kitab Bhavan, 1967-1972), 1:76, 98-99. Barbara Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahira*, 41-44. Roggema believes that little truth can be surmised from the available sources.

identification of which was written first remains difficult to establish.

The opening in the Syriac account, which details the meeting between Muhammad and Bahira, parallels the accounts in the *Life of Muhammad* and the *History* of Tabari.[117] During their meeting, Sargis Bahira told Muhammad what his life's work would entail, and this led to a series of questions and answers between the two. As a work of Christian polemic, the Syriac account intended to show that Muhammad had no religious knowledge outside of what he learned from Bahira, shown in question-and-answer sections in which Muhammad sought answers for all possible difficulties in preaching his message.

The conclusion of this Syriac manuscript[118] offers Christian readers an explanation of how the Qur'an was given to Muhammad. In the tale, Muhammad remained unsure as to how he would placate the crowds if they demanded some type of proof to substantiate his religious message.[119] To assure Muhammad, Bahira told him he would write a book for him and place it in the horn of a cow. (The event is commemorated in the Qur'an as *Sura al-Bakrah*, Sura 2, *The*

[117] See above note 114 and Richard Gottheil, *ZA* 13 (1898):189-210; 14 (1899-1900):203-258; 15 (1901):56-102; 17 (1903):125-166.
[118] Gottheil relied on his translation of *Ms Sachau* 87.
[119] Richard Gottheil, *ZA* 14 (1899-1900):222.

Cow.) The author of the Syriac version concluded that Muhammad was a meek and simple youth who loved the teachings of Sargis, and that he learned the Qur'an from him.[120]

In a second Syriac version,[121] the author identifies himself as Mar Yabh, an anchorite who had known Bahira personally. After the death of Sargis Bahira, Mar Yabh learned that Sargis Bahira had been a bishop who had been well known for being very learned in the scriptures. This version also details that a Jewish scribe introduced to Arabs the tradition that Muhammad was the *Paraclete* and the belief that three days after his death Muhammad was expected to inform his followers of his meeting with the Messiah in heaven.[122] When this event, however, failed to occur, this version ended with a plea to Christ to forgive the confusion surrounding the event. At its conclusion this text claimed how a scribe, in this case the Jewish scribe Kaleb, changed everything that Sargis Bahira had written for Muhammad.[123]

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[120] For these versions see Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahira*, 203-210, and Richard Gottheil, *ZA*, 13 (1898):190-192; 14 (1899-1900):216-222.

[121] Gottheil relied on his translation of *MS Sachau* 10; see Gottheil, *ZA* 14 (1899-1900):232-252.

[122] Gottheil, *ZA* 14 (1899-1900):250-251.

[123] Ibid., 251.

The Arabic version[124] of the Muhammad-Bahira legend is more detailed than the Syriac. For example, there is an apocalyptic theme in the introduction which presents Muhammad as a prophesized Ishmaelite king. When Bahira and Muhammad first met, the monk told the young trader that he was the king he saw in his visions and three weeks after this meeting Muhammad returned because he wanted to hear more of Bahira’s prophecies. In the Arabic version Bahira implored Muhammad to protect the local monks and monasteries by prohibiting any taxes.[125] In response, Muhammad promised to protect all Christians and their churches. In addition, Muhammad was instructed to say that he learned all this from the angel Gabriel, and Bahira wrote and explained lines of prayer that would precede each chapter of the Qur’an: “In the name of the merciful and compassionate God.” The author of this version of the Bahira clearly applied Christian theology to these lines to explain them as references to the Holy Trinity. The Father is the everlasting light; the merciful one is the Son; and the compassionate one is the Holy Spirit.[126]

What follows in the text is a list of nearly two dozen Suras that Bahira is said in this version to have written

[124] Gottheil relied on his translation of *Ms Paris Arabe* 215.
[125] Gottheil, ZA 17 (1903):135-136.
[126] Ibid., 137.

for Muhammad. Bahira also taught Muhammad that a month was the time required for fasting[127] and imparted the basic tenets of Jesus' virgin birth, his life, works, death and resurrection. As another sign of his prophethood Muhammad was given a description of the four rivers in Paradise and of the *Houris*, the maidens who await each man in Paradise. In addition, Muhammad learned that heaven was supplied with food, drink, castles, horses and fine vestments.[128] As the final proof of his prophetic insight, Muhammad was to tell his followers that a book would descend to him from heaven.[129] The book would contain stories of the prophets, narratives of martyrs, exhortations, and other proofs. When these were combined together they verified Muhammad's role as a prophet. This version adds that the book (the Qur'an) was to be called *Furkan*, because it was made up of parts which were collected from many books.[130]

Placing the Muhammad-Bahira meeting in the context of the interaction between desert ascetics and Arabs, one can conjecture that Muhammad met and conversed with monks in his travels as a merchant, a point upon which both

[127] Ibid., 145.
[128] Ibid., 146-147.
[129] Ibid., 149.
[130] Ibid., 153.

Christian and Muslim sources agreed.[131] During these frequent mercantile expeditions Muhammad was exposed to and became familiar with a variety of religious texts that influenced but did not necessarily replace his personal revelations. A series of studies reveals the diverse languages and alphabets that were used among Arabs.[132] The

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[131] For these accounts see Al-Tabari, *The History*, *Vol. VI,* Watt and McDonald, 44-45; the *Life of Muhammad*, The Story of Bahira, 115-117, Guillaume, 79-83; Life of Muhammad, The Apostle of God Marries Khadija, 119-121, Guillaume, 82-83; Theodorus Bar Koni, *Liber Scholiorum,* trans. A. Scher, in *CSCO* 55 (Paris: 1910), 246; Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1997), 403, fn. 57; John of Damascus*,* ΠΕΡΙ ΑΙΡΕΣΕΩΝ, *PG* 94, J.P. Migne, ed. (Paris, 1905):col.111-116; Richard Gottheil, *ZA* 13 (1898):189-210; 14 (1899-1900):203-258; 15 (1901):56-102; 17 (1903):125-166.

[132] For this study see M.C.A. Macdonald, *Literacy and Identity in Pre-Islamic Arabia* (London: Ashgate, 2009). Many of these inscriptions were found along trade routes and detailed aspects of religious rituals. Macdonald also provides a linguistic map of pre-Muslim Arabia, noting where certain dialects were prevalent and the specific aspects of each dialect. Discoveries also suggest that the Arabic script may have originated in areas of Christian Syria. The Zabad inscription, from northern Syria, c.512, records the building of a Christian shrine dedicated to Saint Serguis, who was popular among local Arab tribes. The inscription was in Greek, Syriac and Arabic. The Greek and Syriac portions detail the construction and those involved, and the Arabic invokes Al-Ilah, "God," to help all who were involved. Although scholars remain unsure as to what branch of Christianity that was followed by the builders, the inscription does include a few Chi-Rho Greek letters and Christian crosses, which were commonly used symbols in Christian art and inscriptions. What is important to mention is that this Northern Arabic script became the basis for the later Islamic Kufic script, which was used in the earliest Qur'an manuscripts. See also, Fred Trombley, "Epigraphic Data on Village Culture and Social Institutions: An Interregional Comparison (Syria, Phoenice Libanensis and Arabia)," in *Recent Research on the Late Antique Countryside*, ed. William Bowden, Luke Lavan and Carlos Machado (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 93-94. A second inscription from Jabal Usays, c.528, records a military expedition that was carried out in behalf of the Ghassanid phylarch of the Byzantines, Al-Harith ibn Jabalah; in Greek sources he is known as Arethas. For the political context behind this inscription, see also Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century: Vol. 1 Part 2: Ecclesiastical History*, 117-124. A third inscription to consider, c.568, was found in Harran, Syria. The Arabic and Greek text describe the building of a shrine to Saint John the Baptist by the phylarch Sharahil ibn Zalim, who was also in the service of the Byzantines. This

discovery and cataloging of thousands of inscriptions suggest that a number of Arabic-related dialects contributed to nomadic literacy.[133] As a merchant, Muhammad

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inscription was found in the area of ancient Trachonitis, just east of the Sea of Galilee. Harran is located near Bostra, the city where Muhammad is said to have me the monk Bahira. This area was also home to the Christian Ghassan tribe who were considered to be a group of zealous Christians who abandoned their nomadic traditions to become a sedentary, Christian community. These inscriptions suggest that Muhammad, as a travelling merchant of the seventh-century, would have at least been in the vicinity where Northern Arabic was used by Christian tribal leaders who were in service to the Byzantines and used this script in a Christian context. See also, Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 1995, 325-331. For a further look at the Harran inscription, see also, R. Hoyland, "Epigraphy and The Linguistic Background of The Qur'an," in *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds, 2008, Routledge Studies in the Qur'an, New York: Routledge, 2008), 55-56, 66 note 14. For an overall view of these inscriptions and the individuals involved, see also Greg Fisher, *Rome and the Arabs Before the Rise of Islam*. Self-Published, 2013, 97-107. For a study that details the evolution of Aramaic and Nabataean scripts to Arabic and the specific linguistic characteristics of each script and their style see also, Saad D. Abulhad, DeArabizing Arabia: Tracing Western Scholarship on the History of the Arabs and Arabic Language and Script. New York: Blautopf Publishing, 2011.

[133] See also, A. F. L. Beeston, "Languages of Pre-Islamic Arabia," Arabica, 28, Fasc. 2/3, Numéro Spécial Double: Études de Linguistique Arabe (Jun.-Sep., 1981): 178-186; "Notes on the Muraighan Inscription." *BSOAS*, 16 (1954):389-392; James A. Bellamy, "Two Pre-Islamic Inscriptions Revised: Jabal Ramm and Umm Al-Jimal," *JOAS* 108, no. 3 (Jul.,-Sep., 1988):369-378; Richard Bowen, Jr., "Archaeological Survey of Beihan," in Richard Bowen, Frank Albright, et al*., Archaeological Discoveries* in *South Arabia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1958), 3-13; David E. Graf and Michael J. Zwettler, "The North Arabian 'Thamudic E' Inscription from Uraynibah West, *BASOR* (Aug., 2004):53-89; Philip C. Hammond, David T. Johnson, Richard N. Jones, "A Religio-Legal Nabataean Inscription from the Atargatis/Al-Uzza Temple at Petra," *BASOR* 263 (Aug., 1996):77-80; A.M. Honeyman, "Epigraphic South Arabian Antiquities," *JNES* 21, no. 1 (Jan., 1962):38-43; A. Jamme and W.F. Albright, "An Archaic South-Arabian Inscription in Vertical Columns," *BASOR* 137 (Feb., 1955):32-38; Mohammed Maraqten, Yusuf Abdallah, "A Recently Discovered Inscribed Sabaean Bronze Plaque from Mahram Bilqis near Marib, Yemen," *JNES* 61, vol. 1 (Jan., 2002):49-53; Joseph Naveh, "Graffiti and Dedications," *BASOR* 235 (Summer, 1979):27-30; William Gurdon Oxtoby, *Some Inscriptions of the Safaitic Bedouin* (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1968; F.V. Winnett, "A Monotheistic Himyarite Inscription," *BASOR* 83, (Oct.,1941):22-25.

must have been literate at some level because his first wife, Khadija, asked him to oversee her trading ventures.[134]

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[134] F.E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 141; see Peter Stein, "Literacy in Pre-Islamic Arabia: An Analysis of the Epigraphic Evidence," in *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 255-280. For Muhammad's marriage to Khadija see *Life of Muhammad*, *The Apostle of God Marries Khadija*, 119-122, Guillaume, 82. It must be first noted that the Qur'an does not say explicitly that Muhammad was *incapable* of reading or writing. It says, rather, in Sura 29:48: "And you did not recite any other book before this, nor did you transcribe one with your right hand." This can be supported by Sura 80:11-15 which states that "These verses are a reminder (12) so that whoever wills may remember them (13) for it is recorded in honored sheets (leaves) (14) exalted and purified (15) written by the hands of scribes." According to Sura 80, then, it was scribes who wrote the Qur'an. Complications arise, however, because Sura 25:4-5 indicates that Muhammad himself was accused of rewriting ancient tales and fables: "And those who disbelieve say, 'This [Qur'an] is not except a falsehood he invented, and another people assisted him in it.' But they have committed an injustice and a lie. (5) And they say, 'Legends of the former peoples which he has written down, and they are dictated to him morning and afternoon.'" This Sura implies that Muhammad himself was accused of writing down ancient tales and fables. Sura 80:15, however, indicates that the Qur'an was written by scribes. Sura 7:157-158 identifies Muhammad as the *ummi* prophet: "Those who follow the apostle, the (ummi) unlettered Prophet, whom they find written down in the Taurat (Torah) and the Injeel (Gospel) (158)…Therefore believe in Allah and his apostle, the ummi prophet who believes in Allah and his words." Guillaume, however, in his translation of the *Life of Muhammad*, maintains that the term *ummi* should be defined as gentile, or those who had not been instructed in or introduced to the Bible. Guillaume states: "This word ummi, is generally translated 'illiterate.' In Sura 7:157 and 158 Muhammad calls himself 'the gentile prophet;' but practically all Arab writers claim that he meant that he could not read or write." There is a passage in the *Life* that reads: "God said: 'Do they not know that God knows what they conceal and what they proclaim, and some of them are gentiles who do not know the book but merely recite passages…they don't know the book and they do not know what is in it, yet they oppose your prophethood on mere opinion." Guillaume adds that "Those who follow the ummi prophet" in Sura 7:157-158 refers to Arabs who cannot read scripture but they join with the Jews and recite liturgical prayers and responses. See also, *Life of Muhammad*, *References to the Hypocrites and the Jews in the Sura Entitled the Cow*, 371, Guillaume, 252. With this meaning in mind, Sura 2:78-79 could refer those who had no familiarity with the Bible but knew of or possessed other texts or produced their own religious writings: "And there are among them unlettered ones who know not the Book but only lies, and they do but conjecture. 79. Woe, then, *to those who write the book with their hands* and then say: This is from Allah so that they may take for it a small price; therefore,

Muhammad's Ascetic Attributes

As we have seen in the monastic sources, Arab tribes were impressed by the severe asceticism of the desert monks and the way they thrived in and manipulated the domain of the djinn.[135] Muslim historians saw Muhammad much as the compilers of the monastic histories saw their monks: as a holy man whose life needed to be emulated. In a Muslim context, Muhammad was not an outsider such as a Byzantine or a Roman but an Arab who experienced his visions in a distinctly Arab context via the mediation of an angel who brought a message in Arabic. Much as the ascetics who

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woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn." There is also evidence, however, which suggests that Muhammad was indeed literate. This is taken from several passages from the *Life of Muhammad*. The first addresses Muhammad's first encounter with the angel Gabriel: 'He (Gabriel) came to me,' said the apostle of God, 'while I was asleep with a coverlet of brocade whereon was some writing, and said Read!...So I read it and he departed from me.'" See also, the *Life of Muhammad*, *The Prophet's Mission*, 152, Guillaume, 106. This event, however, is said to have taken place when Muhammad was asleep, so any actual "reading" may be in question. Another example that suggests Muhammad was literate comes from his correspondence with a contemporary prophet named Musaylima: "Musaylima had written the prophet…I heard the apostle saying to them when he read his letter… 'What do you say about it?'... Then he [Muhammad] wrote to Musaylima: 'From Muhammad, the apostle of God to Musaylima, the liar…This was at the end of the year 10 (c.632)." *Life of Muhammad, Musaylima's Letter and the Apostle's Answer Thereto*, 965, Guillaume, 649. Certain passages in the *Life of Muhammad* also suggest that he sent letters to the rulers of surrounding kingdoms; see the *Life of Muhammad*, *Messengers Sent to the Various Kingdoms*, 971-972, Guillaume, 652-659. The contexts of these passages, however, remain unclear whether it was scribes or Muhammad himself who wrote these "letters of the prophet."

[135] In Islam djinn are considered supernatural beings with free will that were created by God. Sura 72 of the Qur'an is dedicated to the djinn. In common terms the word genie derives from djinn.

surrounded him, Muhammad received his revelations through visions; and his visions became the Qur'an.

As the early Muslim community formed, existing stories were collected and reworked to enhance his reputation as a prophet and clarify the historical context of the Qur'an.[136] As a result, it was necessary for Muslim historians and biographers to parallel Muhammad's life with already existing patterns of Christian hagiography and mystical panegyric. These holy attributes included meditating, fasting and praying in a cave or cell;[137] angelic visitations; personal angelic guides; the need for influential, spiritual rhetoric; being a prophetic spokesman for God; the memorization of a revealed spiritual message; the destroying of pagan idols; alleged meetings with Old Testament prophets; powers of negotiation with God; the generational transmission of holy, oral teachings; and the collection of all these holy experiences into a prophetic book meant to be shared with members of the community.[138]

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[136] Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 51-52, 216-217.

[137] It has been suggested that the site of Muhammad's first vision, Mount Hira, may have had a shrine and was a popular spot for meditation. Praying in a cell or a cave was a traditional Christian monastic practice, a practice which Muhammad knew well; F.E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 130, 166.

[138] Another element involves the common use of date palms in miracle stories and their imagery in monastic-prophetic stories. For example,

This literature on Muhammad was initially compiled during the Umayyad Period (661-750) when the first Muslim dynasty began to rule a large Christian population, and writers had been exposed to centuries of Christian hagiographical literature.[139] This period saw the beginning of Muslim intellectual organization, and myth-building was essential in providing a historical identity to the emerging empire.[140] It became the duty of the Umayyad caliphs to collect and record all available information pertaining to the life of Muhammad.

When the Umayyads collapsed (c.750), the Abbasid Dynasty[141] reworked and rewrote the Umayyad-era histories and biographies of Muhammad to fit new social and religious

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the *Life of Paul* details how the monk cleared out his cave before "moving in" and how nearby date-palms provided him food, shelter, and clothing. See Jerome, *The Life of Paul, the First Hermit*, in *NPNF*, 6:300. The connection to Muhammad is that one of his first recorded miracles involved commanding a cluster of dates to fall from a tree and dance before a skeptic before they returned to the tree. See Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 151. For another look at monastic history see the *Church History* of Socrates in *NPNF*, 2:106-110, and the *Church History* of Sozomen in *NPNF*, 2:247-25, 291-296. For more on date palms in this region, see Paul Popenoe, "The Distribution of the Date Palm," *Geographical Review* 16, no. 1 (Jan., 1926):117-121 and Gustave E. von Grunebaum, "The Response to Nature in Arabian Poetry," *JNES* 4, no. 3 (July, 1945):131-151; see Constantine Charalampidis, *The Dendrites and pre-Christian and Christian Historical-Literary Tradition and Iconography* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1995), 69.

[139] Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins,* 151-154.

[140] Eastern Christians were not excluded from the imperial administration, for Greek and Coptic remained important bureaucratic languages used by the Christian subjects under the Umayyads. G. E. von Grunebaum, *Classical Islam: A History 600-1258*, trans. Katherine Watson (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970), 64, 75-77; see Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbāsid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th Centuries)* (London: Routledge, 1998).

[141] This followed the Umayyad Dynasty and lasted c.750-1258.

attitudes and conditions.[142] These were subject to the bias of the collectors of these source materials, who pieced together existing random accounts.[143] In this respect, the Muslim model of preserving material related to Muhammad's life derived from the Christian hagiographical model. In this model, Christian monks often reworked, copied, and elaborated upon the lives of saints and martyrs to provide spiritual enlightenment for the Christian community.[144] That a number of Mesopotamian Christians were employed to contribute to the Abbasid-era literature reinforces the idea that the Christian hagiographical model provided the

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[142] Claude Cahen, "History and Historians," in *Religion, Learning and Science in the Abbasid Period*, ed. M.J.L. Young, J.D. Latham, R.B. Serjeant (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 188-232.

[143] Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 277-281.

[144] One such example was the tale of Abd al-Masih. Abd al-Masih (c.9th century) returned to Christianity after Muslims had forced him to serve in jihad. After he heard a reading of the Gospels he renounced his violent ways and became a monk and moved to Mt. Sinai. Eventually he was captured by a Muslim and taken to Ramla where he was beheaded after refusing to become a Muslim. The martyrdom of Al-Masih became a popular tale among Christians who were living under Muslim rule in Palestine. See also, Mark N. Swanson, "The Martyrdom of Abd al-Masih, Superior of Mount Sinai," in *Syrian Christians Under Islam: The First Thousand Years,* David Thomas, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 107-130. An example of how Muslim hagiography relies on the Christian model is the tale of a man named Faymiyun, a Christian ascetic who came from Syria. According to Al-Tabari, Faymiyun wandered among villages and lived as a builder and would go out into the desert and pray every Sunday. He was also known as a healer but tried to conceal the ability, but anyone who was afflicted would be healed when they crossed his path. Faymiyun and his disciple, Salih, were captured in Syria by a group of Arab traders and sold as slaves in Najran. Christianity took hold in Najran after Faymiyun called upon God to destroy an ornate date palm that was the religious center of their city. For this account, see Al-Tabari, *History*, *Vol. V: The Sasanids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen*, trans. C. E. Bosworth (New York: State University Press, 1999), 192-202.

main model for the collection and presentation of the source material on Muhammad.[145]

The earliest Muslim histories presented an idealized ascetic Muhammad. He was also understood as the final chapter in the long history of prophets and their people. As a result Muhammad's life was integrated into a history of Near Eastern prophecy and hagiography that had been shaped by Christian asceticism and its literature.[146]

One example is the method in which Muhammad sought God: "The apostle would pray in seclusion on Hira every year for a month to practice *tahannuth* as was the custom of Quraysh in heathen days. *Tahannuth* is religious devotion...

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[145] For the relationship between Christian and later Muslim hagiographical tales, see James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 324-331; John Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment, and Servanthood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); *Tales of God's Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Translation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); *Islam and Christianity: Theological Themes in Comparative Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[146] Tayeb El-Hibri, *Parable and Politics in Early Islamic History: The Rashidun Caliphs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). El-Hibri looked at the literature that focused on the four Rightly Guided Caliphs but added that the model used to collect sources on their lives originated with the biographies and histories about Muhammad. Unlike Jews and Christians, Muslims were victorious from the start and felt compelled to present their prophet and their religious movement as triumphant. To support this they relied on oral traditions that were traced back to Muhammad himself or to one of his nearest companions. When these histories and biographies were constructed, authors had to organize and develop a prophetic history and a world history that matched their understanding of Muhammad's life. Accomplishing this, however, was difficult, because Muslim were forced to rely on a high number of non-Muslim and non-Arab Christians who were state secretaries and government officials. See Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 29, 34, 38, 89.

the apostle would pray in seclusion and give food to the poor that came to him."[147] Muslim sources say that it was there, in a cave atop Mount Hira, where Muhammad received his first revelation from Gabriel during one of his ascetic meditations: "The angel Gabriel came to me while I was asleep with a coverlet of brocade[148] whereon some writing was."[149]

A parallel account is found in the life of Pachomius. The monk was said to have been visited by an angel who commanded him to spread a message and he was given a tablet of instruction;[150] Pachomius, however, disagreed with the angel over the number of suggested daily prayers.[151] In like manner, the Qur'an is considered to be the copy of a well-guarded heavenly tablet.[152] During his claimed ascension to heaven, Muhammad is said to have negotiated with Moses to reduce the number of daily Muslim prayers from fifty to five.[153]

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[147] *Life of Muhammad*, *The Prophet's Mission*, 152, Guillaume, 105.

[148] This is a type of quilt that has an elaborately woven fabric.

[149] *Life of Muhammad*, *The Prophet's Mission*, 152, Guillaume, 106. Sozomen stated that monks' wore special tunics and cowls, and the *Lausiac History* stated that Pachomius made cowls embroidered with purple crosses in Greek letters. See also, Sozomen, *HE*, 3:14:5-12, in *NPNF*, 2:292.

[150] Sozomen, *HE*, 3:14:7-9, in *NPNF*, 2:292.

[151] Lausiac History, Pachomius and the Tabennnesiotes, 32:1-10, Meyer, 92-94.

[152] Sura 85:21-22.

[153] *The Life of Muhammad*, *The Ascent to Heaven*, 271, Guillaume, 186-187.

In addition, Shenoute was considered “a prophet and a bearer of the spirit,”[154] and his reputation only increased with tales of his night journey to visit the emperor Theodosius. He also destroyed pagan idols in villages whenever he came across them, and was said to have met with Old Testament prophets and even carried a sword in a second cloud-journey.[155]

Muslim sources later identified Muhammad as the last prophet in the monotheistic succession to Judaism and Christianity, but they did not suggest that Muhammad practiced either of these faiths. Instead, Muhammad sought to encounter the divine in the *same fashion* as Christian desert ascetics.

The following chapter analyzes the texts used by various groups in and near Arabia as they are listed in the *Panarion* of Epiphanius of Salamis.[156] These groups were contemporaneous with a number of the monastic histories and contributed to further parallel verses on Jesus found in the Qur’an and non-Biblical texts.

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[154] *The Life of Shenoute*, 53, Bell, 57.
[155] *The Life of Shenoute*, 58-74, 83-108, Bell, 59-63, 66-74.
[156] Epiphanius lived c.315-403 and wrote the *Panarion* c.377.

CHAPTER 4

QUR'ANIC PARALLELS AND THE *PANARION*

An analysis of the *Panarion* of Epiphanius of Salamis (c.315-403) reveals four specific Jesus parallels between non-canonical texts and the Qur'an. These include accounts of Jesus' birth, when Jesus spoke as an infant, when Jesus brought clay birds to life, and the account of Jesus' crucifixion.

The *Panarion*, best translated as a *medicine chest* for the faithful, contains spiritual antidotes for what Epiphanius calls "the snakebites of heresy." For each of the eighty sects covered, Epiphanius includes an introduction, a description of their relationship to other sects, their errant doctrines, and a refutation of them.

Epiphanius himself states the purpose of composing the Panarion:

> We beseech all those who in a scholarly spirit read the preface, the sects[1] which follow, the defense of

[1] Epiphanius uses the Greek term αἵρεσις to describe each of the eighty divisions that he introduces in the *Panarion*. The literal definition is *a sect, a choice*, a *choosing* or a *school of philosophy*. Depending on the context in which it is used, however, it can also translate as *heresy*. When each sect is introduced, Epiphanius uses the preposition κατὰ, *against*, followed by the name of the group in the genitive plural with no definite article. The *Panarion* suggests that a αἵρεσις, a sect, teaches something; see *Panarion*, 24:3:8, Amidon, 70; *heresy* is used when it refers to the actual teaching of a sect. For simplification and

> the truth, the doctrine of truth, and the faith of the holy Catholic church, to pardon us who are human and who strive with labor and divine zeal to defend orthodoxy. If in any case we have gone too far in our desire to exert our own strength...it is not our custom to ridicule or make fun of people; it is just our zeal against the sects and our desire to turn our readers from them. The very pressure of the verbal contest imposes this labor on us, that we may turn our readers away from them and show that their deeds, rites, and teachings are completely foreign to our way of thinking.[2]

Epiphanius is mentioned by such authors as Jerome and Basil of Caesarea and the in the church histories of Sozomen and Socrates.[3] Sozomen records that Epiphanius lived near a monastery at Besauduc, his birthplace, which was under the control of the city of Eleutheropolis, "the city of the free." Here, just southwest of Jerusalem, Epiphanius was instructed by local revered ascetics. He gained his highest reputation in Egypt and Palestine for his excellence in the

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consistency throughout this chapter I apply the term *sect* to define each division that I will address from the *Panarion*.

[2] *Panarion*, 2:1-2:4, Amidon, 5-6.

[3] Epiphanius was mentioned in several *Letters* of Jerome. *Letter LI*, *From Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, to John, Bishop of Jerusalem*, in *NPNF,* 6:83 contains a type of half-apology from Epiphanius to John who insulted him for his pro-Origenist views regarding the subordination of Jesus to the Father and separation from the Holy Spirit; *Letter LXXXII*, *To Theophilus Bishop of Alexandria*, in *NPNF*, 6:173 mentioned Epiphanius' monastery in Eleutheropolis; in *Letter XC*, *From Theophilus to Epiphanius*, in *NPNF*, 6:184 Theophilus of Alexandria implored Epiphanius to hold a conference in Cyprus to condemn Origen and his works. Theophilus requested that Epiphanius use his political power and persuasion to send messengers to Constantinople to state his position before a group of excommunicated monks reached the city; in *Letter XCI, From Epiphanius to Jerome*, in *NPNF*, 6:184-185 Epiphanius praised the success of the council on Cyprus and urged to fight heresy further; *To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem,* in *NPNF*, 6:424-447, addressed the tension between Epiphanius and John over John's supposed pro-Origenist views.

practice of monastic philosophy. Sozomen says of Epiphanius:

> Hence he is, I think, the most revered man under the whole heaven, so to speak; for he fulfilled his priesthood in the concourse of a large city and in a seaport; and when he threw himself into civil affairs, he conducted them with so much virtue that he became known in a little while to all citizens and every variety of foreigner.[4]

Introduction to the *Panarion*

The *Panarion* was written c. 377 and is one of the most important surviving works on early Christian heresy. The text is presented in an encyclopedic style, but the information is not unique to Epiphanius. There are references to such earlier works ranging from those of Justin Martyr to Irenaeus of Lyons and Hippolytus. The *Panarion*, however, does not simply repeat the earlier writers' details on certain heresies. Instead, it provides updated fourth-century accounts of specified heresies and includes more geographic details than provided in the earlier listings. The *Panarion* has been regarded by some as a type of sociological experiment that heavily promoted

[4] Sozomen, *HE*, 6:32, in *NPNF*, 2:370. In addition to restoring Syrian Christians that had turned away from the Nicene doctrine, Epiphanius was also needed to counteract the growing numbers of the Magusaean sect in Arabia. See Basil, *Letters and Selected Works*, in *NPNF*, 8:294-296. According to Basil, this sect came from Babylon, had no books, teachers or doctrines, and that insisted that everything should be passed from father to son; see Albert de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature* (Brill: Leiden, 1998), 412.

orthodoxy.[5] Epiphanius preserves some early rabbinic traditions and passages of early church historians,[6] but the majority of his descriptions are new descriptive attacks on those whom he understood to be false teachers and leaders of divergent movements.

Epiphanius includes fantastical details of the sects he covers as a means to discredit their theology and practices. It must be noted, however, that the author's intention was to make each sect as repulsive as possible so that anyone reading the *Panarion* would trust it as a safeguard.[7] For example, according to the *Panarion*, false prophets lost their normal state of consciousness and the ability to reason.[8] In contrast, Epiphanius boasts of his continuous conscious connection to God, his scholarly merits, the finality and completeness of his arguments, and his championship of orthodoxy against non-Nicene groups.[9] Even though he was involved in certain ordination and jurisdictional disputes later in life,[10] Epiphanius was

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[5] Andrew Louth, "Palestine: Cyril of Jerusalem and Epiphanius," in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, Andrew Louth eds.,(Cambridge: University Press, 2005), 286-288.

[6] Robert Eisenman, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the First Christians* (Rockport: Castle Books, 1996), 239, 338-339.

[7] Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*: *The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press), 198-201.

[8] *Panarion*, 48:1-10, Williams (1994), 6-21.

[9] *Panarion*, *introduction*, xxv, Williams, (1987).

[10] Socrates, *HE*, 6:10-6:14 in *NPNF*, 2:145-148.

renowned for his work among the poor. Even after his death in 403 many claimed to have been healed at his tomb.[11]

Even though the *Panarion* is avowedly pro-Nicene, Epiphanius relies on his own experiences and investigations when he catalogues his sects. Thus, he provides first-hand information on a number of groups that would otherwise be lost to history. His tone, attitude, and approach may be negative to some modern readers, but the *Panarion* remains an important piece of fourth century literature. The sects presented in the *Panarion* were introduced as having developed a succession of opinions that were contrary to the authorized understanding of Christ-based salvation history. Epiphanius' goal was to have his readers detest these heresies and to frighten them away from any movement that he felt departed from catholic truth.[12] As a polemical work the *Panarion* uses clever yet abusive language to describe the sects it challenges, and it provides an ascetic view of contemporary sects.[13]

The *Panarion* contains inventive, rare, and even exotic descriptions of sects, but it is also a classical work that

[11] Sozomen, *HE*, 7:27, 8:14 in *NPNF*, 2:395, 408.

[12] Panarion, *Preface I*, 2:1, Amidon, 6-7.

[13] Gérard Vallée, *A Study in Anti-Gnostic Polemics: Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius* (Waterloo, Ontario: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, 1981), 63-88. Vallée emphasizes that the works of Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius are important because they provide insight regarding the manner in which fourth-century Christians viewed themselves.

relies on metaphors of snakebites, poisons and remedies to explain the relationship between orthodoxy and those whom Epiphanius saw as teachers of false doctrines. Epiphanius stresses the need to identify, label, and combat any group that was entangled in theological error. His method is to name the founder of each sect and then provide a kind of illegitimate genealogy paralleled to the legitimate genealogies found in the canonical gospels. The *Panarion* contributed to the Christian intellectual system because it was also an apologetic piece of literature.

In this sense, it displays more than just theological anxiety; it also warns believers against movements to avoid and tells them how to return to orthodoxy if they become infected by false teachings. As a work of heresiology the *Panarion* can be seen as a catalogue of a power game between two groups--orthodox and non-orthodox--and it should not be uncomfortable for historians to read these theological details as parts of tangible history. The *Panarion* also provides a unique look at the sociology of Christianity in Late Antiquity from an ascetic perspective.[14]

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[14] Averil Cameron, "How to Read Heresiology," in *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography*, Dale Martin, Patricia Cox Miller, eds., (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 193-206. Cameron also argued that Epiphanius influenced the genre of Byzantine heresiologists who emulated his literary style when they catalogued heresies in certain works from the fifth to ninth centuries.

The *Panarion* also displays how ascetic values were applied and received by fourth-century Christians. Epiphanius defends the Nicene Creed after he connects as many heresies together as he can. For him, then, this reveals their interconnected defectiveness and the need for the use of his "medicine chest." His language clearly insults and denigrates his non-Nicene opponents, and his interest in the varieties of desert asceticism compels him to label their excessive practices as heretical.[15] Even though some suggest that Epiphanius was not an original thinker or an attractive personality,[16] he does exhibit an attractive conservatism in defending his pro-Nicene views.

Before any parallels are introduced, it is best to first cover certain Arabian sects in the *Panarion.*[17] This

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[15] David Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovianist Controversy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 147-150. Hunter looks at how Emperor Jovian (r.363-364) reinstated Christianity following the pro-pagan reign of Julian (d.363). In the context of this period Hunter looks at the emergence of what he labeled the anti-heretical tradition, primarily through the rise of Christian asceticism, and the formation of "orthodoxy" and "heresy" during this period. Epiphanius was included in this study because the *Panarion* stands as the first major work of heresiology following the reign of the pro-pagan Julian.

[16] See Frances Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 194.

[17] There are many references in the *Panarion* to Arabia that assist in identifying where some of these sects were found. For example, the Sampsaeans were said still to have lived in Arabia in Epiphanius' time, the land which he said lies beyond the Dead Sea; *Panarion*, *Abstract*, 53:1, Amidon, 17. This area was also called Paraea and was located on the far side of the Dead Sea, located in Moab near the Torrent Arnon in Ituraea and Nabataea. Today the Arnon River corresponds to the Wadi Mujib in Jordan. This area stretches roughly from east of the Jordan River to southern Syria and included parts of Nabataea, which is modern Jordan. Epiphanius states that the Valesians "dwell in Bacatha, the

provides a sketch of what these groups believed and what texts they possessed.

Sectarianism in the *Panarion*

The Ossaeans originated in Nabataea and Ituraea, in Moabite country near Areopolis[18] (Rabbath-Moab) and the salt valley of the Dead Sea. The prophet among them was Elxai, mentioned earlier.[19] The sect had no use for celibacy but instead endorsed marriage. They also found it permissible to worship idols in cases of forced persecution. Epiphanius notes that in his day, remnants of the sect thrived in Nabataean territory and that adherents of the group worshipped two sisters related to Elxai.[20]

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chief village of Philadelphian Arabia;" *Panarion*, *Abstract*, 58:18, Amidon, 18. Philadelphia is today Ammon, Jordan; *Panarion*, *Abstract*, 58:18, Amidon, 18. The Ebionites and the founder of the Archontics were each said to have resided in Cocaba in Arabia; *Panarion*, 30:2:9, 40:1:5, Amidon, 95, 139. Epiphanius further explains that this area was in the region of Karnaim, which was known as Ahsteroth, in the land of Bashan; *Panarion*, 30:2:7, Amidon, 95. Genesis 14:5 mentions Ashteroth-Karmain and may be modern Al Churak, which today is found east of the Sea of Galilee near the Syrian-Jordanian border. In the description of the Alogoi, Petra is listed as the capital city of Arabia, which is Edom in the Bible; *Panarion*, 51:22:11, 51:30:2, Amidon, 182, 187. The Spring of Gerasa, modern Jerash, Jordan, is also located in Arabia, and Petra of Arabia is again mentioned in the description of the Melchizidekians; *Panarion*, 55:1:9, Amidon, 194. When Epiphanius discusses the Manichaeans, he mentions that the land of the Saracens is located near the border with Palestine, that is, Arabia; *Panarion*, 66:1:7, Amidon, 221. Epiphanius also states that Mt. Sinai was in Arabia, which agrees with Paul's statement in Galatians 4:25 where Paul states, "Hagar represents Sinai, a mountain in Arabia."

[18] This city was east of the Dead Sea and on the border with the province of Arabia. Today it is called Rabba and lies about halfway between Kerak and the Wadi Mojeb.

[19] See above chapter 2.

[20] *Panarion*, 19:2:3, Williams (1987), 45.

In addition to that which was said of the Elchasaites above in chapter 2, Epiphanius adds that Elxai confessed that Christ was the great king. Epiphanius, however, remains unsure as to what this meant since it came "from a book of his foolishness."[21] In addition, the sect believed that Christ's body was ninety-six miles in height[22] and that a feminine Holy Spirit was "like Christ" and stood as an image above a cloud and in between two mountains.[23] Epiphanius believes that Elxai's book contained empty and deceitful phrases,[24] and he also claims that sect members were not allowed to seek the interpretation of his text but were only allowed them to repeat it in prayer.

Epiphanius' description of the Sampsaeans is nearly identical to his description of the Ossaeans. The Sampsaeans resided mainly what is now modern Jordan and were also called the Elcesaeans [the Elchasaites], after their leader Elxai. The Sampsaeans did not accept the legitimacy of the Old Testament prophets or Jesus' disciples as found in the New Testament canon. They also believed that Christ kept reappearing throughout time. He

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[21] *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Book I (Sects 1-46)* trans. Frank Williams, 2nd. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 19:3:4, 50.

[22] *Panarion*, 19:4:1, Williams (2009), 50.

[23] *Panarion*, 19:4:2, Williams (2009), 50-51. This may identify the Holy Spirit with the rising sun, as understood by the Elchasaites.

[24] *Panarion*, 14:4:3, Williams (2009), 51.

first appeared as Adam and then changed bodies for certain historical occasions.

The Nazoraeans and the Ebionites are also mentioned in connection with the Ossaeans. According to Epiphanius, the Nazoraean sect began in Beroea near Coele Syria in the area of the Decapolis near Pella, at a place called Khokhabe in Hebrew.[25] It was not clear to Epiphanius whether they believed Christ was a mere man or accepted the orthodox view of the virgin birth through the Holy Spirit.

Epiphanius also records that Ebion, the founder of the Ebionite sect, had his roots in Arabia east of the Sea of Galilee. The Ebionites rejected the writings of Paul and believed he invented a theology to fit his own pro-Greek agenda. The Ebionites regarded Christ as a prophet of truth but believed he had been adopted by God at his baptism and rewarded with son-ship for leading a virtuous life. Christ, therefore, they saw only as a man, and a prophet, but not the eternal, divine son of God. The Ebionites also practiced circumcision as did the "Saracens called Ishmaelites," and they followed many of the tenets of such other contemporary sects.[26] Epiphanius also reports that the

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[25] This area is just east of the Jordan River in modern Jordan.
[26] *Panarion*, 30:1:1-2:9, 30:33:3-5, Williams (1990), 106-107.

Ebionites were so ignorant regarding Christ that they accepted numerous theories regarding his life and nature.[27]

According to Epiphanius, those sects which he labeled as Gnostic[28] purposely fabricated books and refashioned their fable-filled poetry to express ideas contrary to Nicene Christianity. For example, the Carpocratians taught that Jesus was Joseph's biological child and that Jesus' soul ascended to an unknown father.[29] Also, a certain Cerinthus emphasized Jesus' humanity and claimed that he worked deeds only through the power granted to him by God.[30] To this Epiphanius adds that Cerinthus suggested Jesus did suffer and die but has yet to be raised; this resurrection would take place with the later general resurrection of the dead.[31] Hippolytus states that Cerinthus had been a disciple of the Egyptians and that according to Cerinthus the Christ

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[27] Irenaeus mentioned in *Against Heresies* that the Ebionites used only the *Gospel of Matthew*, practiced some Jewish customs and "adored Jerusalem as if it were the house of God;" Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1:26:2 in *ANF*, 1:351-352.

[28] When Epiphanius uses the term *Gnostic*, *Gnostics* or *Gnosticism*, he refers to sects who "teaches the corruption and perdition of flesh, and that only souls can be purified, and these through initiation;" *Panarion*, 21:4:4, Amidon, 63; *Panarion*, 26; according to Epiphanius, Gnostics also "say that salvation is only of the soul and not of bodies;" *Panarion*, 27:6:11, Amidon, 86; and that Gnostics believe "there are transmigrations of souls and reincarnations of the soul;" *Panarion*, 42:11:17, refutation 24, Amidon, 158. When this dissertation uses the term *Gnostic*, I am simply repeating Epiphanius' use of the term.

[29] *Panarion*, 26:1:3, 26:2:4-5, 26:3:1, 26:6:1, 26:8:1-5, 26:12:1, 27:2:2, 27:5:1, Amidon, 75, 76, 77, 78, 80, 83, 85.

[30] *Panarion*, 28:1:6-7, Amidon, 87.

[31] *Panarion*, 28:6:1, Amidon, 88.

was unable to undergo any physical suffering.[32] *Fragments of Caius* reveals that Cerinthus believed he was a great apostle because he collected instructions a book that had been given to him by angels.[33] Eusebius noted that Cerinthus focused on Christ's earth-based physical kingdom and emphasized physical pleasures and sexual passions.[34]

According to the *Panarion*, both the Carpocratians and the Cerinthians had ties to Arabia through the Ebionites. The *Panarion* states that all three of these sects used a gospel "according to Matthew."[35] The Ebionites were also said to have included some of the same characteristics from the Carpocratians and the Cerinthians.[36] This suggests that these sects must have come together to share or combine their religious views or perhaps even a gospel.

The Marcionites were another sect still found in Arabia at the time Epiphanius wrote the *Panarion*.[37] According to Epiphanius, the sect possessed a *Gospel of Luke* and fragments of Paul's writings, both of which Marcion altered to fit his own doctrines.[38] Marcion also

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[32] Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, 7:21, in *ANF*, 5:114.
[33] *Fragments of Caius*, 2, in *ANF*, 5:601.
[34] Eusebius, *HE*, 3:28:1-5, in *NPNF*, 1:160.
[35] *Panarion*, 30:14:2, Amidon, 102.
[36] *Panarion*, 30:1:3, Amidon, 94.
[37] *Panarion*, 42:1:2, Amidon, 144.
[38] *Panarion*, 42:9:1-4, 42:10:1-7, Amidon, 148. Epiphanius also states that Marcion believed that Christ came in the flesh as a complete human being; *Panarion*, 42:10:6, Amidon, 148.

taught that Jesus "fled to the good god above" to avoid death.[39]

In the *Panarion*, the Encratite sect is said to have followed certain apocryphal books that included the *Acts of Andrew*, *John*, and *Thomas* and select sections of the Old Testament.[40] According to Epiphanius, the Alogoi sang hymns to Mary in Arabic in Petra, which was the capital city of Arabia.[41] Locals believed Mary to have been a virgin and her offspring, Jesus, was known by the common name of Dusares, which means "the only begotten of the Lord."[42] The sect had a presence in what is now modern Jerash, Jordan, where inscriptions of hymns to Mary and Dusares/Jesus have been found among the late antique ruins. In Jerash it was believed that every year the spring waters turned to wine on the anniversary of Jesus' first miracle, which had occurred at the wedding in Cana. Epiphanius himself mentions this spring, the miracle, and the festival that took place at what he described as a martyr's shrine.[43]

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[39] Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics*, 1:38, in *ANF*, 3:262; *Panarion*, 42:16:7, Amidon, 160.

[40] *Panarion*, 47:1:5, Amidon, 168

[41] *Panarion*, 51:22:11, Amidon, 182.

[42] Ibid.

[43] *Panarion*, 51:30:1-2, Amidon, 187. Jerash had a very strong Christian presence for it contained several churches, as well as the *Fountain Court* for the water-miracle festival, and was an important site for pilgrims wanting to visit an important part of the Decapolis. Jerash also sent representatives to the Council of Seleucia in 359, and Chalcedon in 451, and the last church was built there in 611. Decline came with earthquakes, Persian invasions, and the Muslim conquest in

The Theodotians, named after Theodotus from Constantinople, are listed by Epiphanius as an offshoot of the Alogoi.[44] They declared that Jesus was a mere human being formed from the seed of a man, and they compared his life to that of Moses, focusing on the prophetic call and viewing him simply as a prophet.[45] Hippolytus[46] mentions that Theodotus' viewpoints were an offshoot from the Cerinthians, and the Ebionites, who were from Arabia.

Mani and the Manichaeans also come under criticism. By combining the *Church History* of Socrates with references from Epiphanius and Archelaus' *Disputation with Manes*, we can piece together details on the life of Mani.[47] Mani was

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636. See Jason Moralee, "The Stones of St. Theodore: Disfiguring the Pagan Cult in Christian Gerasa," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14, no. 2 (Summer, 2006):183-215; Chester Charlton McCown, "The Calendar and Era of Gerasa," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 64 (1933):77-88 and, of the same author, "The Yale University: American School Excavation at Jerash, Autumn, 1930," *BASOR* 43 (Oct., 1931):13-19.

[44] *Panarion*, 54:1:1, Amidon, 192.

[45] Theodotus collected whatever texts he found useful; *Panarion*, 54:1:9, Amidon, 192. Hippolytus traces the sect to Cerinthus and the Ebionites.

[46] Also see Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, 7:23, in *ANF,* 5:114.

[47] This debate is found in Archelaus, "The Acts of the Disputation with the Heresiarch Manes," trans. S.D.F. Salmond, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* Vol. 6. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 4th printing, 2004), 6:179-235. Further attention to Manichaean origins is found in Alexander, Bishop of Lycopolis, "*Of the Manichaeans,*" trans. James Hawkins, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* Vol. 6. (Peabody, M: Hendrickson Publishers, 4th printing, 2004), 6:241-252. According to Socrates, it was a Saracen from Arabia named Scythianus who introduced ideas later adopted by Mani. Scythianus was learned in the Greek language, literature, and sciences and introduced the concept of dualism to Christians. He is said to have reached India by way of Ethiopia where he became wealthy and developed more of his doctrines. Scythianus produced four books known as the *Mysteries*, the *Summaries*, the *Gospel*

said to have learned his initial religious doctrines from the writings he inherited from a disciple of one Scythianus, a Saracen, and then added his own interpretations. According to his orthodox critics, he considered himself to be the Paraclete and the Apostle of God.[48]

According to the *Cologne Mani Codex*, Mani spent his childhood and early adult years among the Elchasaites. In time, however, Mani became dissatisfied the teachings of the sect. Eventually he was inspired by a series of personal revelations from a personal messenger which led him to oppose the standard teachings of the Elchasaites.[49] Believing that Mani's revelations undermined their authority, the sect expelled him. Mani, however, spread his beliefs during his extensive travels, but he relied on a

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and the *Treasures*. He apparently wrote these while being carried away in the spirit and was strongly influenced by his trip to Jerusalem in apostolic times. Epiphanius calls him a magician with magical books that he purchased during his travels, which were a combination of his own "wisdom" and pagan fables. Scythianus fell off a building and died while attempting to perform magical rites, and his disciple, Terebinthus, who later changed his name to Buddas, suffered the same fate in Persia. The widow of one of these men bought a slave named Cubricus and left to him all the writings and an inheritance. Cubricus then moved to Persia, changed him name to Mani, and shared his books and his ideas with those he met. Socrates states that the movement led by Mani began "a little while before the time of Constantine;" Socrates, *HE*, 1:22, in *NPNF*, 2:25-26.For an updated look at Mani's debate with Archelaus, see Jason Beduhn, Paul Mirecki, ed., *Frontiers of Faith: The Christian Encounter with Manichaeism in the Acts of Archelaus* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

[48] See above, chapter 2, note 26; see Socrates, *HE*, 1:22, in *NPNF*, 2:26.

[49] Luttikhuizen, *Gnostic Revisions of Genesis Stories*, 170-184.

series of texts he had acquired during his stay with the sect.

Mani was imprisoned for his inability to heal the son of the Persian king, and, according to Epiphanius, arranged a visit from his twenty-two disciples and sent them on a mission.[50] He chose three--Thomas, Hermias, and Addas--to go to Judea, pose as Christians, and collect as many Christian texts as possible. Mani studied these texts while he was still in prison, and he wove together pieces of Christian teaching with his own imaginative ideas to create his own doctrines. This would have enabled Mani to present himself as the Paraclete from the Gospel of John. According to Epiphanius, Mani paid off the Persian guards and escaped, and later he had a series of debates[51] with local Christians on the Mesopotamian-Persian border.[52] The Persian king became aware of Mani's escape and had him returned to Persia where he was skinned alive.[53]

Appolinaris taught that Mary and Joseph had sexual relations after Jesus was born, a belief so upsetting to

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[50] During the reign of Bahram I, c.273-276.

[51] Epiphanius reports that refutations against Mani were composed by Bishop Archelaus, perhaps Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Eusebius of Emesa, Serapion of Thmuis, Athanasius of Alexandria, George of Laodicea, Apollinaris of Laodicea, Titus of Bostra, and others; *Panarion*, 66:20:3, Amidon, 231.

[52] *Panarion*, 66:5:9-12, 66:7:1, 66:10:1-66:11:9, Amidon, 225-226, 227-228.

[53] *Panarion*, 66:12:1-6, Amidon, 228.

Epiphanius, a believer in Mary's perpetual virginity, that he wrote a letter to this Arabian sect: "The ignorance of those who have no exact knowledge of the sacred scriptures and who have not applied themselves to the histories, turns from one thing to another and distracts the one who wishes to trace something of the truth with his own mind."[54]

A recent study suggests that these Jesus parallels indicate that certain passages in the Qur'an pre-dated Muhammad's prophetic career and were somehow later incorporated into the revelations.[55] These pre-Muhammad verses are believed to represent a narrative collection--oral and written--that belonged to certain independent monotheistic communities in Arabia. Some have identified the members of these communities as monotheistic God-seekers who were familiar with and reliant upon biblical as well as non-biblical texts. Certain Jesus-based stories were common among such groups and were retained and later reformulated by a specific Arab monotheistic community that

[54] *Panarion*, 78:7:1, Amidon, 348.

[55] Fred Donner, "The Historical Content," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 35. Donner points out that one of the problems in attempting to establish a historical context to the Qur'an is that it is considered a divine, unchanging text that lies outside of any historical context. Scholars of the nineteenth century introduced critical approaches to the chronology of the Qur'an and the history of early Islam. Now, in the twenty-first century, scholars are even more skeptical than their predecessors and no longer assume the reliability of Muslim literature.

was guided by Muhammad's revelations.[56] The existence of these parallel verses, however, should not suggest that Muhammad simply borrowed individual verses. Instead, they seem to reflect a continuation of monotheistic thought among certain communities.

A number of verses in the Qur'an deny claims that Muhammad was a forger, a poet, and a soothsayer, who relied upon a teacher and written stories from ancient times.[57] Also, there are a number of words in the Qur'an that are not of Arabic origin, which suggests a possible foreign influence. Therefore, such claims could be taken as evidence that Muhammad was familiar with extra-biblical texts and the groups who possessed them. These tales were then later enhanced by the divine status of his subsequent revelations.[58]

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[56] See G.R. Hawting, "John Wansbrough, Islam, and Monotheism," *Method and Theory in the Study of* Religion, 9, no. 1 (1997):23-28.

[57] See Suras 16:101-3, 21:5, 25:4-5, 26:221-225, 36:69, 37:36, 52:29, 30, 33, 69:41-46, and 81:22, 25.

[58] Claude Gilliot, "Creation of a Fixed Text," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 41-57. For an instrumental study on the Syriac influence on the Qur'an see A. Mingana, "Syriac Influence on the style of the Kuran," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 11 (1927): 77-98. For the relation of passages and style between the Qur'an and the *Diatessaron* of Tatian, see J. M. F Van Reeth, "L'évangile du prophéte," in *La sacralité du texte dans le monde de l'Islam, Actes du Symposium international tenu à Leuven et Louvain-la-Neuve du 29 Mai au 1 Juin 2002*, D. De Smet et al., eds., (Leuven: Belgian Society of Oriental Studies, 2004), 155–74. For a more recent study on a Syro-Aramaic reading of the Qur'an, see Christoph Luxenberg (pseud.), *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran* (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2007).

Parallel Verses: The Birth of Jesus

The parallels concerning the birth of Jesus are found in the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* (Ps. Mt) and Sura 19:16, 23-25 of the Qur'an.

A series of letters attributed to Jerome preface a Latin translation of Ps. Mt. These letters indicate that Jerome produced his translation to counter a version of a *Hebrew Matthew* that had been published by a Manichaean.[59] Although these letters by Jerome were most likely added by later editors to enhance the introduction to Ps. Mt,[60] analyses of Ps. Mt reveal its connection to and perhaps reliance upon other apocryphal gospels.

A starting point is the Decretum Gelasianum. This text is traditionally attributed to Pope Gelasius, c.492-496 and contains lists of canonical and non-canonical texts. The Decretum, however, most likely dates closer to the sixth century.[61] The relevance of the Decretum lies in its lists of the apocryphal books.

E. Ammon identifies from the Decretum *the Nativity of the Savior and of Mary or the Midwife* as the source for Ps.

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[59] Thomas, a disciple of Mani, may have written this gospel when he traveled and spread Mani's beliefs. *Panarion*, 66:5:3, 66:12:3, 66:31:8, Amidon, 224, 228, 236.

[60] M.R. James, ed., *The New Testament Apocrypha* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924, reprint, Berkeley: Apocryphile Press, 2004), 70

[61] Ernst von Dobschütz, *Das Decretum Gelasianum* (Leipzig, 1912).

Mt.[62] Ammon also proposes that the *Gospel of James the Younger* from the Decretum is the *Protoevangelium of James* (PJ).[63] E. de Strycker suggests that this *Gospel of James the Younger* could be Ps. Mt,[64] and M. R. James believes that PJ and the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*[65] are the two main sources for Ps. Mt.[66] M.R. James also suggests that Ps. Mt is the same as the *Book of the Infancy of the Savior* that is listed in the Decretum.[67] In a more recent study, James Elliot argues that Ps. Mt derives from PJ, and the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, and sections of the *Arabic Infancy Gospel of the Savior*.[68] These studies suggest, then, that Ps. Mt was in existence well before the Decretum.

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[62] E. Ammon, *Le Protévangile De Jacques et ses Remaniements Latins* (Paris: 1910), 104.

[63] Ibid. The title of this gospel was not applied to the sixteenth century. It came from a French scholar who wished to fill in the gap in the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, which began with the announcement of John the Baptist. Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction*, trans. Brian McNeil (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 64-65.

[64] E. de Strycker, *Le Forme La Plus Ancienne de Protévangile de Jacques* (Brussels: 1961), 43.

[65] Some manuscripts have "James," instead of Thomas. For example, the Decretum has the *Gospel of James the Younger*. See Klauck, 73-74.

[66] James, 70.

[67] Ibid.

[68] James Keith Elliot, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation Based on M.R. James* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 84-99. Elliot shows that Ps. Mt 1-17 derived from PJ and that 26-34, 37-39, and 41 derive from *Infancy Thomas*. Constantine von Tischendorf popularized the name *Pseudo-Matthew* when he found the title in a Latin version of the text. Constantine von Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha* (Leipzig: Mendelssohn, 1853), 51-112.

The parallel passages to address are the birth of Jesus as found in Ps. Mt and the account of his birth as mentioned in the Qur’an. Ps. Mt reads as follows:

> And it came to pass on the third day of their journey, as they were walking, that the blessed Mary was fatigued...and seeing a palm tree she Said to Joseph: Let me rest a little under the shade of this[palm] tree. Joseph therefore made haste, and led her to the palm...Then the child Jesus...said to the palm: O tree, bend your branches, and refresh my mother with your fruit... at these words the palm bent its top down to the very feet of the blessed Mary; and they gathered from it fruit...Then Jesus said: open from your roots a vein of water...and let the waters flow, so that we may be satisfied from you. And it rose up immediately, and at its root there began to come forth a spring of water.[69]

A parallel is found in Sura 19:16, 23-25, which mention Jesus’ birth:

> And mention Mariam [Mary] in the Book when she drew aside from her family to an eastern place... 23. And the pains of childbirth compelled her to take herself to the trunk of a palm tree...24. Then the child called out to her from beneath her: Grieve not, Surely your Lord has made a stream to flow beneath you. 25. And shake towards you the trunk of the palm tree, and it will drop on you fresh ripe dates.

Similarities include the palm tree’s giving fruit and supplying the spring, both at Jesus’ command. It appears in Sura 19:24 that Jesus is speaking as he is being born, while in Ps. Mt he appears to be somewhat older. Sura 19 does not mention Joseph as in Ps. Mt. Omitting Joseph emphasizes Jesus as the son of Mary, a mortal woman, and corresponds with the frequent Qur’anic expression *Son of*

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[69] *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, 20, in *ANF*, 8:376-377.

Mary, which is used to identify Jesus twenty-three times in the Qur'an. The Joseph omission also corresponds with Sura 3:47, where God alone was responsible for creating Jesus.

Parallel Verses: Jesus Speaking as an Infant

In addition, similarities are found between the *Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior* and Qur'an passages which mention that Jesus spoke as an infant in the cradle.[70] Sura 3:46 reads: "And he [Jesus] shall speak to the people when in the cradle and when of old age, and he shall be one of the good ones." Sura 5:110 reads: "O Isa son of Mariam, remember my favor on you and your mother when I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit, when you spoke to the people when in the cradle and when of old age."[71] The Qur'an further specifies when the infant Jesus spoke:

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[70] *The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior*, in *ANF*, 8:405.

[71] This Cerinthian idea of Jesus returning to live, die, and be raised in the future is similar to Shi'a Muslim views that claim that Jesus will return with the Mahdi, defeat the antichrist, and restore the world to Islam. Jesus plays an integral role in Muslim eschatology. His return is mentioned in Sura 43:61: "And indeed, Jesus will be [a sign for] knowledge of the [last] Hour, so do not be in doubt of it, and follow Me. This is a straight path." According to certain Islamic interpretations, Jesus will return to the Holy Land, and after killing the Antichrist, will establish with the Mahdi a community for those who submit to Allah. He will live for forty years, and according to some Hadith, he will marry, have children, make his Hajj to Mecca and eventually die. Sura 19:33, then, refers to Jesus' future death according to Muslim tradition. With his appearance alongside the Mahdi, the hidden Imam, the two resemble the two witnesses in Revelation 11:1-13, who are believed to be two Biblical characters that never died but were somehow taken alive into heaven. For these accounts see Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi *in Twelver Shi'ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981),

> 19:27: And she came to her people with him, carrying him with her. They said O Mariam! Surely you have done a strange thing...29. But she pointed to him [Jesus] and they said: How should we speak to one who is a child in the cradle? 30. He said: Surely I am a servant of Allah, He has given me the Book and made me a prophet 31. And He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has enjoined on me prayer and almsgiving as long as I live...33. And peace on me on the day I was born, on the day that I die and on the day that I am raised to life.

The *Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior* contains a very similar account:

> The following accounts we found in the book of Joseph the high priest, called by some Caiaphas: He relates that Jesus spoke even when he was in the cradle and said to his mother: Mary, I am Jesus the Son of God, the Word that you have brought forth according to the declaration of the Angel Gabriel to you, and my father has sent me for the salvation of the world.[72]

In the Qur'an passage Jesus simply declares himself a prophet and a servant of God, which replaces his announcement as the Son of God and Word mentioned above in the *Infancy Gospel*. Studies on the *Arabic Infancy Gospel* suggest that this gospel most likely derived from an original Syriac[73] work as early as the fifth century;[74]

171-172. See Sunan Abu Dawud, *Hadith: English Translation*, trans. Ahmad Hasan (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 2000), 37:4310.

[72] *The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior*, 1, in *ANF*, 8:405.

[73] See *Introductory Notice: Apocryphal Gospels*, in *ANF*, 8:352-353. The Syriac language played a major role in the transmission of these ideas into Arab communities. For example, George, a bishop of Arabian tribes in Mesopotamia, wrote various commentaries on the Bible c. 570. Scholars suggest that this was probably originally written in Syriac and then translated into Arabic because references in the *Life of Muhammad* that deal with New Testament terms and phrases refer to the Syriac version. An Arabic translation of the New Testament was completed c. 630-640 by a Monophysite scholar named Johannes. Up until then Arabia was exposed to all types of scriptures used by the monks discussed in chapter 3; see Parrinder, 146.

others believe that certain passages in the *Arabic Infancy Gospel* that mentioned Mary are drawn from the *Infancy Gospel of James*[75] and that the miracles of the child-Jesus derive from the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*.[76] Another study notes that the *Arabic Infancy Gospel* has several resemblances to Ps. Mt.[77]

The parallels of Jesus speaking as an infant seem to fulfill one specific role: to have Muhammad's revelations surpass and replace the canonical gospels. According to a number of passages in the Qur'an[78] the Bible has been corrupted by mistranslations and alterations. Therefore, the Qur'an includes missing, authentic material on the child Jesus and offers a more complete story of Jesus' life. Jesus' speaking in the cradle as an infant is one such story, and another is the child Jesus' bringing clay birds to life.

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[74] The *Arabic Infancy Gospel* also supplies a connection to Sura 19, for in this account the holy family rests under a sycamore tree where Jesus brought forth a fountain for Mary to wash his clothes.

[75] Ehrman, *The Proto-Gospel of James*, in *Lost Scriptures,* 63-72; *The Protoevangelium of James*, in *ANF*, 8:361-367.

[76] Ehrman, *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, in *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), 57-62; *The Gospel of Thomas*, in *ANF*, 8:395-404. This *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* is not to be confused with the *Coptic Gospel of Thomas*, discovered in Nag Hammadi in 1945; see Robert J. Miller, ed., *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press 1992), 301-322; *The Gospel of Thomas*: *The Hidden Sayings of Jesus*, trans. Marvin Meyer (San Francisco: Harper San Fransicso, 1992); see J.M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 1977), 124-138.

[77] G. Schneider, *Evangelia Infantiae Apocrypha* (Freiburg: 1995), 47-55, 173-195.

[78] Sura 2:59, 2:75, 78, 79, 3:77-79, 5:13, 15, 5:41.

Parallel Verses: Jesus and Clay Birds

Further parallels include a scene in which Jesus gave life to birds that he made out of clay. The *Arabic Infancy Gospel* mentions this story twice. The first account says that a seven-year-old Jesus made figures out of clay as he played with other boys: "Then the Lord Jesus said to the boys: The images that I have made I will order to walk...And they immediately began to leap...He had made figures of birds and sparrows, which flew when He told them to fly, and stood still when He told them to stand."[79]

The second mention states: "Again, on another day, the Lord Jesus was with the boys at a stream of water...And the Lord Jesus had made twelve sparrows, and had arranged them around his fish-pond...when the Lord Jesus clapped His hands over the sparrows which He had made, they flew away chirping."[80]

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[79] *The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior,* 36, in *ANF,* 8:412. There are Syriac copies of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* which date to fifth and sixth centuries and others suggest an earlier Greek original. See Simon Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 105-126; T. Chartrand-Burke, "The Greek Manuscript Tradition of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas," *Apocrypha* 14 (2000): 129-151; Stephen Gero emphasizes that the study of oral traditions could be the most valuable method in determining the date of *Thomas* but admits that even this method is not conclusive; see Stephen Gero, "The Infancy Gospel of Thomas: A Study of the Textual and Literary Problems," *Novum Testamentum* 13, Fasc.1 (Jan., 1971):46-80; Bart Ehrman, Zlatko Plese, *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1-7.

[80] *The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior*, 46, in *ANF*, 8:414.

This tale is also found in Ps. Mt: "In the sight of all, Jesus took clay from the pools which He had made, and of it made twelve sparrows...He struck His hands together, and said to His sparrows: Fly! And at the voice of His command they began to fly... [Jesus said] Go and fly through the earth, and through all the world, and live."[81]

The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, too, has this account.[82] A first Greek form reads that after he had collected flowing waters into pools, a five-year-old Jesus made some soft clay and "Fashioned out of it twelve sparrows...And Jesus clapped His hands, and cried out to the sparrows, and said to them: Off you go! And the sparrows flew, and went off."[83] A second Greek version reads: "And Jesus made of that clay twelve sparrows... [Jesus] looked upon the sparrows, and said: Go away, fly, and live, and remember me. And at this word they flew, and went up into the air."[84] The Latin form reads: "And when Jesus was five years old, there fell a great rain...and He collected it into a fish-pond...He took of the clay which was of that fish-pond and made of it to the number of twelve sparrows...Jesus opened His hands, and ordered the sparrows saying: Go up into the

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[81] *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, 27, in *ANF*, 8:378.

[82] Also called the *Gospel of Thomas*; see *The Gospel of Thomas*, *First Greek Form* in *ANF*, 8:395-398; *Second Greek Form* in *ANF*, 8:398-399; *Latin Form* in *ANF*, 8:400-404.

[83] *The Gospel of Thomas*, *Frist Greek Form*, 2, in *ANF*, 8:395.

[84] *The Gospel of Thomas*, *Second Greek Form*, 3, in *ANF*, 8:398.

air, and fly...And they flew."[85] Irenaeus refers to specific chapters[86] in *Thomas*, but he does not mention the text by name. Hippolytus stated that the Naasseni relied on "a gospel inscribed to Thomas,"[87] and Origen acknowledges the existence of a *Gospel of* Thomas, a text which he considers to have been outside of the canonical four.[88] Cyril of Jerusalem, too, reports that the Manichaeans wrote the *Gospel of Thomas*, which "corrupts the soul."[89] Similarly, Epiphanius in the *Panarion* states that one of Mani's disciples, Thomas, collected Christian texts in Jerusalem and spread Mani's doctrines throughout Syria and Judea.[90] A gospel compiled by this Manichaean Thomas could have been included because there is a "*Gospel of Thomas which the Manichaeans Use*" that is listed in the Decretum.[91]

Jesus giving clay birds life is mentioned twice in the Qur'an, in Suras 3:49 and 5:110. Sura 3:49 reads:

> I [Jesus] have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that I design for you out of clay the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with God's permission.

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[85] The Gospel of *Thomas*, *Latin Form*, 4, in *ANF*, 8:400.

[86] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1:20:1, in *ANF*, 1:344. This tale describes an arrogant, young Jesus learning his letters in school; this same tale is also found in Ps. Mt, 30, 31, in *ANF*, 8:379. This may be evidence that Infancy Thomas and Ps. Mt were contemporary, second-century texts.

[87] Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, 5:2, in *ANF*, 5:50; Hippolytus connects the Naasseni to practices of the Egyptian and Phrygian mysteries.

[88] Origen, *Homilies on Luke*, 1, Lienhard, 6.

[89] *Cyril of Jerusalem*, *Lecture* 4:36, in *NPNF*, 7:27.

[90] *Panarion*, 66:5:3, 66:12:3, 66:31:8, Amidon, 224, 228, 236.

[91] James, 22.

Sura 5:110 reads:

> When God will say: O Isa son of Mariam! Remember my favor on you...when you designed out of clay a thing like the form of a bird by My permission, then you breathed into it and it became a bird by My permission.[92]

In the Qur'an, God gives Jesus permission to perform this sign, in contrast to the Christian sources in which Jesus does this on his own divine authority.

Two of the above parallels--Jesus' making clay birds and talking in the cradle--were also placed into the biography of Muhammad. According to the *Life of Muhammad*, the Prophet was visited by a Christian delegation from the city of Najran. The delegation discussed many aspects of Christian doctrine that centered on Jesus and the Trinity:

> They [Christians] argue that he [Jesus] is God because he used to raise the dead and heal the sick, and declare the unseen; and make clay birds and then breathe into them so that they flew away; and all this was by the command of God Almighty ...They argue that he is the son of God in that they say he had no known father; and he spoke in the cradle and this is something that no child of Adam has ever done...concerning all these assertions the Qur'an came down.[93]

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[92] Muslim commentaries on this passage emphasize that it was God who allowed Jesus to perform this miracle; Jesus did not do this on his authority. However, this elevates Jesus to a high status for Muslims because God chose him to perform miracles. For such views see Neal Robinson, "Creating Birds from Clay: a Miracle of Jesus in the Qur'an and Classical Muslim Exegesis," *Muslim World* 79, no. 1 (1989):1-13. The story of Jesus bringing life to clay birds is found in Jewish traditions as well. Certain characters in those accounts are dated to c.90 BCE, but the formation of the tradition dates to the seventh century CE and stand as a composite Jewish reaction to the local, growing Christian community; see Morris Goldstein, *Jesus in the Jewish Tradition* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1950), 148-154.

[93] *Life of Muhammad, A Deputation from the Christians of Najran*, 403, Guillaume, 271-72. Muhammad condemned the delegation not because they refused to submit to him but rather because they worshipped the cross,

The mention of these two miracles of Jesus in the *Life of Muhammad* indicates that they were popular traditions and were consistently applied to the Muslim Jesus. Jesus' bringing clay birds to life was a miracle not too outrageous, and since it presents us with the most parallels, it must have been well known and well circulated.[94]

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ate pork, and asserted that Jesus is the son of God. One of the men from Najran then asked Muhammad, "Who, then, is the father of Jesus?" Muhammad was unable to answer the question, but then he received the first eighty verses that became Sura 3 in the Qur'an. This details the oneness of God and mentions Jesus several times emphasizing his subordinate role when compared to God. Therefore, this section of the *Life* simply restates Sura 3, and is accompanied by a type of commentary in which Muhammad denounced certain beliefs of the visiting delegation. Accordingly, God knows that Christians invented doctrines that made Jesus God and Lord, even though they knew he was not. How, then, can Jesus, who was one formed in the womb like every other child of Adam, be God when he occupied such a place? Sura 3 is further presented until the closing lines once again mention the meeting of the two groups. In the *Life*, the Qur'anic revelations take precedence over the events, and Muhammad even invoked a curse upon the delegation for refusing to accept his divine interpretations. However, there is a strange section in the *Life* that appears to be God directly talking about Jesus:

> "I gave Jesus power over those matters in virtue of which they say he is God such as raising the dead, healing the sick, creating birds of clay, and declaring the unseen, I made him thereby a sign to men and a confirmation of his prophethood wherewith I sent him to his people. But some of My majesty and power I withheld from him such as appointing kings by a prophetic command and placing them where I wished, and making the night to pass into day and the day into night and bringing forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living and nurturing whom I will without stint, both the good and the evil man. All of that I withheld from Jesus and gave him no power over it. Have they not an example and a clear proof that if he were a God all that would be within his power, while they know that he fled from kings and because of them he moved about the country from town to town." *Life* of Muhammad, *A Deputation from the Christians of Najran*, 406, Guillaume, 274.

[94] Muhammad also presented these stories to certain Jews he met with and often conversed; see *Life of Muhammad*, *References to the Hypocrites and the Jews in the Sura Entitled 'The Cow,'* 373, Guillaume, 253.

Parallel Verses: The Crucifixion of Jesus

It is in Irenaeus'[95] account of Basilides[96] that we first find views parallel with the Qur'an's account of the crucifixion of Jesus:

> Wherefore he [Jesus] did not himself suffer death, but Simon, a certain man of Cyrene, being compelled, bore the cross in his stead; so that the latter being transfigured by him, that he might be thought to be Jesus, was crucified, through ignorance and error, while Jesus himself received the form of Simon, and, standing by, laughed at them...he transfigured himself as he pleased, and thus ascended to Him who had sent him.[97]

In the *Panarion*, Epiphanius writes that Basilides followed the Gnostic view of an angelic creation and that "in a fit of poetic madness" he named each of the heavens.[98] Epiphanius also often identifies Basilides a devotee to the arts of trickery and magic because he spread Docetic views about Christ.[99] Epiphanius confirms Irenaeus' report that Basilides taught that Simon of Cyrene had been transformed to appear as Christ:

> He [Basilides] says that while Simon was carrying the cross he [Jesus] transformed him into his own

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[95] In his *Epistle to the Trallians,* Ignatius groups Basilides with the Docetic movement. The term *docetic* comes from the Greek and means *to appear*, or *to seem*. In this Christological view Jesus only *appeared* to have been a human being.

[96] Tertullian gives an account of Basilides' views in *Appendix: Against All Heresies* in *ANF*, 3:649-650. For Hippolytus on Basilides see *The Refutation of All Heresies*, 7:8-7:15, 10:10, in *ANF*, 5:103-109, 144-145. Further comments on Basilides are found in Archelaus' *Disputation Against Manes* in *ANF*, 6:233; and Irenaeus, *Against All Heresies*, 1:24:4, in *ANF*, 1:349; *Panarion*, 24, Williams (1987), 70-77.

[97] Irenaeus, *Against All Heresies*, 1:24:4 in *ANF*, 1:349.

[98] *Panarion*, 24:2:2-3, Amidon, 69.

[99] *Panarion*, 24:2:2, 3:1, Amidon, 69.

> form and himself into Simon, and in place of himself he handed over Simon to be crucified. 4. While the latter was being crucified, Jesus stood facing him but invisible, laughing at those crucifying Simon. But he himself ascended to the heavenly places, having given over Simon to be fixed on the cross, while he went up to heaven without suffering. 5. So it was Simon who was crucified and not Jesus. For Jesus, he [Basilides] says, ascending to heaven, passed through all the powers until he was restored to his own Father.[100]

The parallels are found in Sura 4:157-158 of the Qur'an:

> And [for] their saying, "Indeed, we have killed101 the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of God." And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him [Jesus] to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain. 158. No! God raised him [Jesus] up to himself and God is mighty and wise.102

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[100] *Panarion*, 24:3:3-6, Amidon, 69.

[101] Sura 5:110 refers to Jesus speaking at an old age so this may be taken that he did not die on the cross.

[102] A key character in this sequence is Simon of Cyrene. In the canonical gospels, in Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21 and Luke 23:26, Simon is assigned to help Jesus carry the cross *en route* to his crucifixion. In the Qur'an, however, Simon is not even mentioned in the crucifixion passages. In the above Irenaeus passage on the views of Basilides, Simon carried the cross and was made to look as Jesus; in Muslim accounts there is no Simon, but later commentators stated someone was made to look as Jesus; in the New Testament, Simon helped Jesus carry the cross but Jesus was the one who was crucified. Others have suggested that the notion of Simon being crucified in place of Jesus was only a politically motivated statement from an anti-Semitic Docetist; Bentley Layton, "The Significance of Basilides in Ancient Christian Thought," *Representations* 28 (Autumn, 1989): 131-151. A Qur'an commentary says of this passage: "But some of the early Christian sects did not believe that Christ was killed on the Cross. The Basilidans [Basilides] believed that someone else was substituted for him. The Docetae [Docetism] held that Christ never had a real physical or natural body, but only an apparent or phantom body, and that his Crucifixion was only apparent, not real. The Marcionite Gospel (about A.D. 138) [Marcion] denied that Jesus was born, and merely said that he appeared in human form. The Gospel of St. Barnabas supported the theory of substitution on the Cross. The Quranic teaching is that Christ was not crucified nor killed by the Jews, notwithstanding certain apparent circumstances which produced that illusion in the minds of some of his enemies; that disputations, doubts, and conjectures on such matters are vain; and that he was taken up to God." Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary* (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc., 1987), 230, fn. 663. See also,

According to Eusebius, the most thorough refutation of Basilides was produced by one Agrippa Castor.[103] This refutation revealed that "Basilides wrote a twenty-four book summary on the Gospel, and invented prophets for himself named Barcabbas and Barcoph and others who had no existence, and he assigned them barbarous names in order to amaze those who marvel at such things."[104] Jerome, too, mentions Agrippa Castor:

> Agrippa surnamed Castor, a man of great learning, wrote a strong refutation of the twenty-four volumes which Basilides the heretic had written against the Gospel, disclosing all his mysteries and enumerating the prophets Barcabbas and Barchob and all the other barbarous names which terrify the hearers, and his most high God Abraxas...Basilides died at Alexandria in the reign of Hadrian[105] and from him the Gnostic sects arose.[106]

The sources seem to suggest that Basilides wrote commentaries or exegetical works and perhaps his own gospel. Clement of Alexandria quotes from the twenty-third book of Basilides' *Exegetics*;[107] Theodoret states that

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M. M. Ayoub, "Towards an Islamic Christology, II: The Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion," *Muslim World* 70, no. 2 (1980): 91-121.

[103] He also writes against Isidore, the son of Basilides. For more on this see *ANF*, 1:178-179, notes 7-15.

[104] Eusebius, *HE*, 4:7:7, in *NPNF*, 1:179; Epiphanius comments that the Ophite sect followed a prophet Barcabbas and Basilides' son, Isidore, wrote on a prophet named "Parchor;" *NPNF*, 1:179, fn.13. This same view is expressed in *NPNF*, 3:368, which adds that Basilides died at Alexandria during the reign of Hadrian (117-138).

[105] Hadrian ruled 117-138.

[106] Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, *XXI*, in *NPNF*, 3:368.

[107] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 4:12: *Basilides' Idea of Martyrdom Refuted*, in *ANF*, 2:423-425.

Basilides cut pages out of divine Scripture;[108] in his *Homilies on Luke*, Origen states that Basilides dared to write a gospel and applied to it his own name;[109] and Jerome mentions a gospel of Basilides in his *Commentary on Matthew*.[110] A recent study suggests that Basilides' works were not concerned with the life and teachings of Jesus but with content much different from that of the canonical gospels. This material could have contained explanations of Basilides' theology or interpretations on canonical or non-canonical gospels.[111] The *Panarion* also mentions that Basilides argued there was no need to endure martyrdom since Christians witnessed to the crucified Simon and not the Christ who returned to his heavenly father. Those who followed Basilides did not call themselves Jews, yet were not Christians, but were instead somewhere in between.[112] This comment corroborates the claim found in both Socrates

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[108] Theodoret, *Letters, 104*, in *NPNF*, 3:288. Theodoret later adds that Basilides accepted the conception of the Virgin and the birth but denied that God the Word took anything from the Virgin; see Theodoret, *Letters,* 145, in *NPNF*, 3:313.

[109] Origen, *Homilies on Luke*, trans. Joseph T. Lienhard (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 6; Origen does not distinguish Basilides' teachings from those of Marcion's dualism and Docetism.

[110] Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, trans. Thomas Scheck (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 52.

[111] James A. Kelhoffer, "Basilides Gospel and 'Exegetica' (Treatises)," *Vigliae Christianae* 59, no. 2 (May, 2006):115-134.

[112] *Panarion*, 24:5:5, Amidon, 70. For more on Basilides' view of martyrdom, see Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, in *ANF*, 2:423.

and Sozomen that a number of Arabian sects did not live as Jews or Christians but as a group somewhere in the middle.

The Archontic sect is also included in these crucifixion parallels. According to Epiphanius, the Archontic sect believed that God did not allow prophets to be killed; they were suddenly taken up to heaven in moments of great despair and returned to earth three days later.[113] The sect also believed that the flesh died and that the soul alone was raised to life. The Archontic[114] sect also maintained an unusual fixation on Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve, and focused on his travels through heaven and

[113] *Panarion*, 40:7:6, Amidon, 141; this specific reference is to two prophets, Martiades and Marsianus, who were snatched up to the heavens and returned to Earth three days later. According the *Panarion*, the Archontic sect fabricated apocryphal books and possessed piles of other books and the sect fooled simple folk while dressed in the guise of monks; see *Panarion*, 40:2:1-4, Amidon, 140.

[114] The originator of the Archontic sect was Peter, who lived in "the city of the free," just a few miles beyond Hebron. This Peter was an *anchorite*--from the Greek ἀναχωρέω, *to retreat*, *retire* or *withdraw from society* as type of hermit--who lived in a cave, wore sheepskin, and gave all of his possessions to the poor. He is said to have bounced from sect to sect and was even a presbyter at one time before he was dismissed from his post by Aetius, bishop of Lydda. Peter then traveled to Arabia and lived in Cocaba, where he spent most of his time in a cave. This Peter is said to have had piles and piles of books including a *Lesser* and *Greater Concord*, *Aliens*, and the *Ascension of Isaiah*, all of which he introduced and shared with anyone that visited his cave. The *Book of Concord* seems to be the most well known, for Epiphanius provides its contents. The book includes divisions of the heavens and the archons (rulers or principalities) in each one and other ranks of beings in each division. The sect also placed a divine mother in the eighth heaven that was above all, and they were also against the sacraments, baptism and the resurrection of the flesh. See John C. Reeves, *Heralds of That Good Realm: Syro-Mesopotamian Gnosis and Jewish Traditions* (London: Brill, 1996), 114-116.

his transformation into a spiritual being.[115] Much as with Muhammad's later Night Journey and ascension into heaven, angels carried Seth to heaven, nourished him, protected him from death and brought him back safely to earth. As a result of this Sethian focus, the sect produced several books in his name.[116]

Further Qur'anic parallels with the Archontics are found in a text they possessed, the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*. Dating from the second or third century, the *Treatise* recorded a speech that Jesus allegedly gave to his followers:

> I did not succumb to them as they had planned. But I was not afflicted at all. Those who were there punished me. And I did not die in reality but in appearance...For my death, which they think happened, happened to them in their error and blindness it was another, Simon, who bore the cross on his shoulder. It was another on whom they placed the crown of thorns. But I was rejoicing in the height...laughing at their ignorance.[117]

[115] For Jewish origins of the Sethites, see A.F.J. Klijn, "A Seminar on Sethian Gnosticism," *Novum Testamentum* 25, Fasc. 1 (Jan., 1983):90-94. For Sethian texts and their apocalyptic theme, see Howard M. Jackson, "The Seer Nikotheos and His Lost Apocalypse in the Light of Sethian Apocalypses from Nag Hammadi and the Apocalypse of Elchasai," *Novum Testamentum* 32, Fasc. 3 (July, 1990): 250-277; on Seth's ascension and return to Earth, see *Panarion*, 40:7:1-3, Amidon, 141.

[116] These books included works written in the names of famous men; seven in Seth's name; a revelation of Abraham; and another in Moses' name; *Panarion*, 39:5:1-3, 39:6:1-5, Amidon, 137, 138.

[117] *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, 55-56, trans. Roger Bullard and Joseph Gibbons, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English,* ed. J.M. Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 365. Hippolytus covers the Sethians in his *Refutation of All Heresies* and focuses on their principle tenets. See Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, 5:13-5:17, 10:7 in *ANF*, 5:64-69, 142-143. According to Hippolytus, the doctrines of the Sethians were found in their sacred book, the *Paraphrase of Seth*. The *Apocalypse of Peter* also mentions a substitute at the crucifixion who bore the likeness of Jesus, while the *First Apocalypse of James*

In Muslim exegesis the most commonly accepted view of Sura 4:157-158 is that a substitute for Jesus died on the cross but that Jesus escaped the crucifixion and was taken up to heaven, a view echoed above in the *Second Treatise*. Al-Tabari's (c.870) commentaries on 4:157-158 contain several traditional interpretations, but he recognizes only one as the authentic traditional interpretation of the crucifixion. In this version the likeness of Jesus was projected onto a single volunteer while Jesus safely exited through the roof of a house where the disciples had gathered. As a result, those who saw the crucifixion were confused because, in reality, the Jews did not kill Jesus; he only appeared to have died. This version became the accepted Muslim tradition because al-Tabari traced the account to Ibn al-Abbas (d.c.687), who had been a companion of Muhammad himself.[118] Tracing the tradition to a companion of the Prophet authenticated and elevated the account

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distinguishes between the visible, crucified body of Jesus and his uncorrupt body that was inside his crucified body; see Robinson, *Nag Hammadi*, 260-276, 377.

[118] Al-Tabari's (c.870) commentary on 4:157 contains several traditional interpretations, including that of Wahb ibn Munabbih (d.c.732). Ibn Munabbih was from Yemen and reportedly well versed in Christian and Jewish literature and history, thus the high praise he received by Muslims regarding his Qur'an commentary. In the first report, God made all the disciples[118] look like Jesus after the Jews found them gathered in a house. To avoid having all of them killed, Jesus asked who wanted to enter paradise as his volunteer for crucifixion. The Jews assumed the volunteer was Jesus, who was then taken and crucified. Jesus, however, had been immediately raised to heaven, and, as a result, all the witnesses were confused and thought that Jesus had been killed.

against other existing interpretations. Even though the identity of the volunteer[119] varies in the Muslim accounts, the parallel passages to Sura 4:157-158 agree that there was a substitute for Jesus at the crucifixion. The wide-ranging commentaries on Sura 4:157-158 and even the authoritative Muslim interpretation of the crucifixion of Jesus reflect ideas held by various sects from as early as the second century.

In summation, the Qur'an's depiction of Jesus' crucifixion greatly resembles the views held by the Archontics and Basilides. Peter, the founder of the Archontic sect, was said to have possessed piles of numerous apocryphal books. Members of this sect were said in Arabia to have misled people while dressed as monks. The Archontics also possessed the *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, which also has parallels to Sura 4:157-158. According to the views expressed by Irenaeus, and Epiphanius, Basilides may have written his own gospel or gospels. These writings may have been shared among the Archontics and the followers of Basilides.

Basilides himself was said to have been a fellow student with Saturnilus, and each influenced the

[119] Accounts named Simon of Cyrene, Judas Iscariot, a Roman guard, Jesus' twin, and a Jew who was mistakenly arrested.

Carpocratians, Valentinus, and others.[120] The Nasaraeans are listed in the *Panarion* as Jews who accepted Jesus nominally.[121] The Sampsaeans were not Christians, Jews, or pagans, and they nominally confessed Christ as well.[122] Jews were said to have despised the Nazoraeans because they were fellow Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah.[123] Ebion confessed that he was of the Jewish race, but he remained opposed to the Jews and desired to be called a Christian. This sect is said to have had varying views, too, regarding Jesus.[124] Elxai was another Jew who held some Jewish doctrines but did not live according to the Law. He also accepted Christ, to a degree, and he was said to have translated his texts from Hebrew.[125]

Writing in the fifth century, Theodoret states that the followers of Basilides, the Ebionites, the Nazarenes, the Elkasites, and the Cerinthians remained prominent in Arabia, Palestine, and Syria. He does not simply repeat sections from the *Panarion* but adds his own material on

[120] *Panarion*, 23:1:2, 27:1:2, 31:1:5, Amidon, 65, 83, 108.
[121] *Panarion*, 18:1:1, Amidon, 55.
[122] Panarion, 53:1:7, Amidon, 190.
[123] *Panarion*, 29:9:2-3, Amidon, 93.
[124] *Panarion*, 30:1:3-5, 30:3:1-3:7, Amidon, 94, 95.
[125] *Panarion*, 19:1:5, 19:3:4, 19:4:3, Amidon, 56-57.

these sects. This is evidence, then, that a number of these sects remained flourishing.[126]

In his book, *Islam*, Alfred Guillaume, the translator of the *Life of Muhammad*, notes the presence of other groups in and near Arabia:

> The Nestorians were equally active. They established schools in many towns. In their monasteries monks could be heard chanting their offices, so that the Arabs became accustomed to seeing the monks pray day and night, prostrating themselves with their faces to the ground. In prayer the Christians turned to the east. Such men were a familiar sight to all on the caravan routes of Arabia. The monastery at Hira was established by the Nestorians in the fifth century...The church in the east was predominately Nestorian, though a fair number of Monophysites were to be found there.[127]

Nestorian Christians believed Jesus was crucified with respect to his humanity but not with respect to his divine nature.[128] In contrast, Monophysite Christians believed that both natures suffered on the cross.[129] The Qur'an, however, asserts that Jesus, a human prophet, did not die on the cross but that God took him to heaven.[130] In light of these varying views, it can be argued that Sura 4:157-158 was Muhammad's attempt to reconcile the differing views on the

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[126] Theodoret, *Compendium Haereticarum Fabularum*, *PG* 83, J.P. Migne, ed. (Paris: 1864): col. 280-481.

[127] Alfred Guillaume, *Islam* (New York: Penguin, 1956), 15. For the extent of Nestorianism in Arabia, see G.R.D. King, "A Nestorian Monastic Settlement on the Island of Sir Bani Yas, Abu Dhabi: A Preliminary Report," *BSOAS* 60, no. 2 (1997):221-235.

[128] Kelly, 311; on Nestorian Christology see Kelly, 311-330.

[129] *The Refutation of the Trinity*, *15* in *Early Muslim Polemic Against Christianity: Abu Isa al-Warraq's 'Against the Incarnation,'* trans. David Thomas (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 93.

[130] Sura 4:158, 3:55; 19:33 and 3:46 suggests that Jesus did not die on the cross.

crucifixion of Christ with his personal revelations. Muhammad, then, could be identified as a sort of ascetic peacemaker between these various sects. Sura 30:31-32 states: "Turn to God and be careful of your duty to Him, and keep up prayer and be not of the polytheists, or of those who divided their religion and became sects, [because] every sect [was] rejoicing in what they had with them [in belief]." The Qur'an's instructions are to avoid becoming another sect, such as those which were located in or near Arabia.

The Qur'an seems to suggest that some members of the Meccan community desired to initiate their own, distinct sect: "Our Lord! Why did you not send to us an apostle so that we could have followed your communications and been of the believers!" (Sura 28:47-49). Likewise, Sura 37:167-169 adds: "And surely they [pagan Arabs] used to say: If we had had a reminder from those [prophets] of the past, we certainly would have been the servants of God – the purified ones." Sura 35:42 states: "And they [pagan Arabs] swore by God with the strongest of their oaths that if there came to them a warner [a prophet] they would be better guided than any of the nations."

Furthermore, Sura 26:192-199 declares: "And most surely this is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds.

The Faithful spirit has descended with it, upon your heart that you [Muhammad] may be of the warners, in plain Arabic language. And most surely the same [revelation] is in the scriptures of the ancients. Is it not a sign to them that the learned men of the Israelites knew it? And if we had revealed it [the Qur'an] to any of the foreigners [non-Arabs], so that he should have recited it to them, they would have not believed in it." The Qur'an came directly from God, and in Arabic. It was not the product of a sect, which the Qur'an stresses to avoid. Muhammad was seen as a genuine recipient of revelation as opposed to foreign sect leaders, i.e., Jews, Christians, or a combination of the two.

It can be suggested, then, that "under the impact of his direct religious experience these stories became *revelations* and no longer remained mere tales which they were before. Through his experiences he cultivated a direct community with earlier prophets and became their direct witness."[131] Even though Muslim sources acknowledge that Muhammad knew and interacted with Christians, no human being ever was considered even in passing as the *source* of his revelation.

[131] Fazlur Rahman, "Pre-Foundations of the Muslim Community in Mecca," *Studia Islamica* 43 (1976):10.

These sects would have accepted Jesus as the Messiah and a miracle worker but not as the divine son of God (as does the Qur'an). Muhammad's revelations enabled him to transcend the founders of previous religious groups, such as those in the *Panarion*, because by his own admission he was considered the Seal of the Prophets; he came with truth and verified the message of previous apostles;[132] there were no errors in his message, which came only through God's revelation, and Islam was to prevail over all other religions.[133]

Parallel Conclusions

The parallels identified in this chapter suggest that non-Biblical stories about Jesus were kept alive by sectarians who operated outside imperial orthodox constraints or boundaries.[134] In the Muslim context,

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[132] This refers to previous prophets and not to the apostles of the New Testament.

[133] Sura 33:40, 37:37, 48:28; 53:2-5, 61:9.

[134] There are also parallels with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the Qur'an. The Collyridians are a sect in the *Panarion* who were said to have worshipped Mary. Their name derives from the Greek word for a type of small cake, κολλύριον, which the sect used in certain Mary ritual ceremonies. The deaconesses of the sect decorated a certain stool or chair and adorned it further with a special cloth and then presented the small bread-cakes as an offering to Mary. According to Epiphanius, the group had put Mary in place of God; *Panarion*, 79, Williams (1994), 620-629. The idea of Mary's being considered a deity is also paralleled in the Qur'an. Sura 5:72-73 states, "Surely whoever associates others with Allah, then Allah has forbidden to him the garden, and his abode is the fire." The same ideas continue in verse 73: "Certainly they disbelieve who say: Surely Allah is the third person of three, and there is no god but the one God." Sura 5:75 indicates that Mary was a

however, the passages about Jesus were accepted as divinely revealed, and there is no hint that they were borrowed from Christians.

Some of these groups saw Jesus as an ordinary human being and a prophet who was unable to undergo any type of suffering. Leaders of these sects ranged from cave dwelling ascetics to those who believed an angel revealed to them a book and designated them as an apostle or prophet. Various groups relied on selected passages from the Old and New Testament or composed their own works or altered texts already in use by contemporary sects.

"truthful woman who ate food," which suggests a belief in only her humanity and non-divine status. However, Sura 5:116 presents what can be argued as a reference to the Collyridians: "And when Allah will say: O Isa [Jesus] son of Mariam did you say take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah?" There are a few possible explanations for interpreting this verse. One, Muhammad understood the Trinity to consist of the Father, Jesus, and Mary; two, the Qur'an is plainly condemning the Collyridian sect because it worshipped Mary as a deity while Muslims do not; or, three, the verse refers to some other seventh century sect with views similar to those held by the Collyridians. It is also possible that certain groups understood Mary as the representation of a feminine Holy Spirit but that she remained outside the Trinitarian equation and that Muhammad probably never encountered remnants of the Collyridians. An example was the Elchasaites, who viewed the Holy Spirit as a feminine force but did not include Mary in a Christian Trinity. Some even argue that the existence of the Collyridians and Sura 5:116 suggest the existence of a complete, separate, Marian religion separate from Christianity started by Mary herself after she was shunned by her local Jewish community. The Collyridian sect could also be an Arabian branch of the Montanist sect that allowed women priests and placed a heavy emphasis on two female prophetesses, Priscilla and Maximilla; see Henry Smith, "Christian Influence upon Islam," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 42, no. 4 (July, 1926): 279; Francois de Blois, "Nasrani (Ναζωραῖος) and hanif (ἐθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam," *BOSAS* 65, no. 1 (2002):13-14; Michael P. Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins* (Princeton: University Press, 1992), 43-45.

In addition to the above analysis, it remains important to look also at which personal relationships may have influenced Muhammad’s understanding of Jesus and at the sources that record initial reactions to Muhammad’s religious movement.

CHAPTER 5

INFLUENCES ON MUHAMMAD

Extant sources also detailed Muhammad's personal relationships with Christians, in addition to the indication of monastic influences and the parallels mentioned above. Muslim historians did not hesitate to assign and surround Muhammad with Christians, which suggests that the intended audience knew and recognized such associations.

Waraqa ibn Naufal

Khadija, a rich merchant woman in Mecca, had hired Muhammad to transport and sell her goods in Syria after she heard of his honorable character. On one trip, Muhammad took with him Maysara, who was a young associate of Khadija.[1] When the two arrived in Syria, Muhammad rested in the shade of a tree near a monk's cell.[2] The monk approached Maysara and told him only prophets sat under that tree. On the return trip Maysara is reported to have seen two angels

[1] *The Life of Muhammad*, *The Apostle of God Marries Khadija*, 120, Guillaume, 82.

[2] This account is separate from that which mentions a young Muhammad's meeting with the monk Bahira; see *Life of Muhammad*, *The Story of Bahira*, 115-117, Guillaume, 79-81.

shading Muhammad from the sun’s rays.[3] When the men returned to Mecca, Maysara recounted the details of the trip to Khadija. She was so impressed with the accounts of what had happened to Muhammad that she proposed to him marriage.

After Muhammad and Khadija were married, she revealed to her cousin, Waraqa ibn Naufal, the story of the monk who had recognized Muhammad as a prophet and how two angels had shielded him from the sun. Waraqa, who was a Christian scholar and a master of biblical scriptures,[4] told Khadija that if the tales were true, then Muhammad was indeed the prophet for his people.[5]

A tale of nearly identical circumstances involves a story in which Waraqa ibn Naufal identifies Muhammad as a prophet after Khadija approached him regarding Muhammad’s first revelation:

> Surely, by Him in whose hands are Waraqa’s soul, if you have spoken to me the truth, O Khadija, there has come unto him [Muhammad] the greatest Namus, [Gabriel] who came to Moses beforehand, and he is the prophet of his people...[on Muhammad’s return to Mecca]...Waraqa said to Muhammad “You will be called a liar, and they will use you despitefully and cast you out and fight against

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[3] *The Life of Muhammad*, *The Apostle of God Marries Khadija*, 120, Guillaume, 82.

[4] Waraqa is also listed as one of several men of the Quraysh tribe who rejected traditional tribal polytheism and accepted Christianity.

[5] *The Life of Muhammad*, *The Apostle of God Marries Khadija*, 121, Guillaume, 83.

> you. Verily, if I live to see that day, I will help God in such wise as He knows."[6]

In another passage in the *Life*, Waraqa provides moral support for lower-class Muslims who were being persecuted by Meccan polytheists. In the account, as Waraqa witnessed the torture of Bilal, a Muslim who refused to denounce the goddesses Al-Lat and Al-Uzza, he simply said "One, one, by God, Bilal." Waraqa then promised the men who mistreated Bilal that he would make his tomb into a shrine if he were killed. The emphasis on *"one,"* from a Muslim point of view, may display Waraqa's monotheistic beliefs but there is no indication in the passage that he became a Muslim or that he rescued Bilal.[7]

In the *Life*, Waraqa is portrayed as one of four men who abandoned polytheism and searched for the true religion of Abraham and became Christian.[8] One study even suggests

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[6] *The Life of Muhammad*, *The Prophet's Mission*, 153-154, Guillaume, 107. The word *Namus* derives from the Greek for "law," νόμος, and the *Life* refers to the translation of the Syriac equivalent, *namwos*, which Waraqa would have known as a master of biblical languages. It should be noted that the *Life* does not record that Waraqa became a Muslim, nor does it record his death. This alone may indicate that Waraqa did not believe Muhammad to be a true prophet and that he retained his personal religious beliefs.

[7] One theory proposes that Waraqa was an Ebionite priest who prepared Muhammad to lead Ebionites who were in Mecca. However, Muhammad abandoned this when he arrived in Medina for there he received considerable power and began a distinctly Arab religious movement; see Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed. *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context* (New York: Routledge, 2008). For an updated analysis of this theory see David Thomas, Barbara Roggema, ed., *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, Vol. 1, 600-900* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 27-28.

[8] William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 51. For the *Hadith* that mentions Waraqa, see

that Muhammad and Waraqa cooperated for a while and promoted an Arab Christianity but fell into disagreement and that the religion of Islam was the result.[9]

Unfortunately, the *Life of Muhammad* does not indicate what type of Christianity Waraqa followed. There exists a *Hadith*, however, that describes how Waraqa wrote the gospels in Hebrew:

> Khadija then accompanied him [Muhammad] to Waraqa ibn Naufal…Waraqa was the son of her paternal uncle, her father's brother, who during the Pre-Islamic Period became a Christian and used to write the Hebrew writing and used to write of the Gospels in Hebrew as much as Allah wished him to write. He was an old man and had lost his eyesight.[10]

The mention that Waraqa wrote the gospels in Hebrew with God's apparent blessing is significant. Waraqa is said to have learned from those who followed the Torah and the Gospel.[11] This could have included groups who possessed a *Hebrew Matthew*, the *Diatessaron*, *According to the Hebrews*, or any of the other texts that have been shown to have Qur'anic parallels.

Passages in the *Life* suggest, too, that Waraqa ibn Naufal had known Muhammad since he was a child. The first

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Bukhari, 1:1:3, where Waraqa dies shorty after recognizing Muhammad as a prophet; in 4:55:605 Waraqa recognizes Muhammad and pledges his support; 6:60:478 follows what is found in 1:1:3 and 9:87:111 also follows 1:1:3 and 6:60:478; see *Life of Muhammad, Four Men Who Broke with Polytheism,* 143, Guillaume, 98-99.

[9] See, Abu Musa al-Hariri, *Priest and Prophet* (Lebanon: 1991).

[10] Sahih al-Bukhari, 9:87:11.

[11] *Life of Muhammad*, *The Prophet's Mission*, 153, Guillaume, 107.

time that Waraqa ibn Naufal is mentioned in the *Life of Muhammad*, he found a young Muhammad in Mecca after he had run off from his foster-mother. According to the *Life*, after Ibn Naufal had returned the boy to his grandfather, a number of Abyssinian Christians saw the child Muhammad with his foster-mother and they requested to take him back with them to their country because they knew he had a great future.[12] This story also implies that there were a number of Ethiopian Christians in Mecca.

Muhammad married Khadija when he was twenty-five years old, and he experienced his first revelation when he was forty. This presents us with a fifteen-year span in which Muhammad traveled throughout Arabia, Syria and Palestine, areas where he could have encountered Christian monks and members of other religious groups. In addition, if Muhammad had known Ibn Naufal since childhood, he could have learned from Waraqa the Old and New Testament and perhaps other texts that are paralleled in the Qur'an.

There is no way to determine whether Waraqa really existed or whether he was a Muslim literary invention meant to show that even Muhammad's Christian relatives acknowledged his prophetic call. In some Muslim accounts,

[12] *The Life of Muhammad*, *The Birth of the Apostle and His Suckling*, 106-107, Guillaume, 72-73.

Waraqa died shortly after Muhammad's first revelation, while in others he lived for several more years and remained a Christian.

Salman

The *Life of Muhammad* also mentions that a Persian slave, Salman, who converted from Zoroastrianism to Christianity in Syria and then became a Muslim and was a friend of Muhammad and was with him later in Medina.[13] According to the account, Salman decided to follow Christianity after he heard some monks praying in a church. Salman became disillusioned, however, after he had learned that the local bishop was corrupt. Following this even, Salman sought true monotheists for advice and guidance. During his travels, Salman began hearing that a prophet was to come from Arabia. He traveled through Mesopotamia to Jordan, and eventually to Medina where he met Muhammad. As in the Bahira stories, Salman recognized Muhammad as a prophet when he saw the physical marks on his back between his shoulders. Later, after he purchased his freedom from his master, Salman joined Muhammad later in the Battle of

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[13] *Life of Muhammad*, *How Salman Became a Muslim*, 136-143, Guillaume, 95-98; Robinson, 25; Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965), 162.

the Ditch,[14] where he played an important role.[15] In *Life of Muhammad*, Salman sought out an ascetic living beyond a Syrian village to ask him where and how to pursue the religion of Abraham. The ascetic instructed Salman to seek out Muhammad, the prophet from Arabia who will bring this religion to the world. After later revealing this story to Muhammad, Salman was informed by the Prophet that the ascetic he had met was Jesus the son of Mary.[16]

Other Possible Influences

Muhammad's adopted son, Zaid ibn Haritha, came from parents belonging to a Christian tribe in southern Syria and was bought by Muhammad's first wife, Khadija. Zaid, however, later became a Muslim, so any theory of a direct influence upon Muhammad is questionable, unless perhaps Muhammad had frequently interacted with his parents before the sale.[17]

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[14] This is also referred to as the Battle of the Trench and took place c.627.

[15] Robinson, 25; *Life of Muhammad*, *How Salman Became a Muslim*, 142, Guillaume, 98.

[16] *Life of Muhammad, How Salman Became a Muslim,* 143, Guillaume, 98. This account may have helped explain the ambiguity of the crucifixion in the Qur'an and related verses that suggest Jesus did not die on the cross but lived to old age.

[17] Parrinder, 162. Zaid is the only contemporary Muslim mentioned by name in the Qur'an, Sura 33:37. For slavery in Islam, see Kecia Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). Ali argues that the legal language for marriage also applies to slavery and cites early jurists that held similar attitudes on marriage and slavery. Also see William Gervase Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Later in his life Muhammad had a Coptic concubine named Mariyah.[18] Muhammad is also said to have listened to Christian sermons by Bishop Quss ibn Sida of Najran, while he attended a merchant festival near Mecca.[19]

There was also a king, Uthman al-Huwayrith, a relative of Khadija, Muhammad's first wife. After al-Huwayrith had converted to Christianity, he was aided in 605 by the Byzantines in hopes that he would become king of Mecca. Al-Huwayrith later went to work for the Byzantine emperor and held a high political office.[20]

Residents of Mecca

The *Life of Muhammad* states that a Coptic Christian lived in Mecca and was hired to repair the roof of the

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Clarence-Smith looks more at modern Islamic views on slavery and argues a social, cultural shift from Qur'anic views on slavery. For slavery in the Qur'an, see 4:24, where it is legal to marry slaves; 16:77, where slaves are described as helpless before their masters as are idols before God; 23:5, where it is lawful to have slave-girls; 24:34, where female slaves are not to be forced into prostitution; 33:50, where it is permissible to take slaves as spoils of war; and 70:30, where it is legal to use slaves as concubines.

[18] *Life of Muhammad*, *Messengers Sent to the Various Kingdoms*, 972, Guillaume, 653.

[19] Parrinder, 162; Trimingham, 77-78; Quss is said to have been well-known for his great skills in rhetoric.

[20] *Life of Muhammad*, *Four Men Who Broke with Polytheism*, Guillaume, 99. Some argue that Huwayrith sought a religious solution to the economic problems in Mecca and believed an alliance with the Byzantines would solve the problem. On this see William Montgomery Watt, *Islam and the Integration of Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1961), 13. For the tribal context of an Arab working with the Byzantines, see M.J. Kister, "Al-Hira: Some Notes on Its Relations with Arabia," *Arabica* 15 (Jun., 1968):154.

Ka’ba.[21] In addition, a Meccan Jew is said to have translated a Syriac text that was discovered in a corner of the Ka’ba during repairs.[22] The *Life of Muhammad* reports that a Biblical text was found inscribed on one of the stones of the Ka’ba:

> They found a stone in the Ka’ba forty years before the prophet’s mission,[23] if what they say is true, containing the inscription, “He that sows good shall reap joy; he that sows evil shall reap sorrow; can you do evil and be rewarded with good? No, as grapes cannot be gathered from thorns.”[24]

This passage is very important because it suggests that someone familiar with these Biblical verses lived in Mecca. The passage itself appears to be drawn from a collection of Biblical verses which include Job 4:8, Psalm 126:5, 2 Corinthians 9:6, Galatians 6:8, and Matthew 7:16.[25] In

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[21] *Life of Muhammad*, *The Rebuilding of the Ka’ba When the Apostle Acted as Umpire*, 122, Guillaume, 84.

[22] Ibid., *Life*, 124, Guillaume,85. In the *Life*, the text is said to have read: “I am Allah the Lord Bakka, I created it on the day that I created heaven and earth and formed the sun and the moon, and I surrounded it with seven pious angels. It will stand while its two mountains stand, a blessing to its people with milk and water;” *Life*, *The Rebuilding of the Ka’ba When the Apostle Acted as Umpire*, 124, Guillaume, 85-86.

[23] This must refer to 610, the year of Muhammad’s first revelation. If so, the stone would have been found in 570, the year of Muhammad’s birth.

[24] *Life of Muhammad*, *The Rebuilding of the Ka’ba When the Apostle Acted as Umpire*, 125, Guillaume, 86. Guillaume notes that this indeed was an unusual occurrence. Islamic tradition maintains that icons of Mary and Jesus adorned the Ka’ba. See King, “The Paintings of the Pre-Islamic Ka’ba” *Muqarnas* 21, *Essays in Honor of J. M. Rogers* (2004):219-229.

[25] Job 4:8: “As I see it, those who plow for mischief and sow trouble reap the same;” Psalm 126:5: “Those who sow in tears will reap with cries of joy;”2 Corinthians 9:6: “Consider this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap

addition, it seems unlikely that the biography of Muhammad would have invented such a story. There is no way to identify who inscribed the stone with these passages, but twice in the *Life* Waraqa ibn Naufal was mentioned as master of Biblical languages. Perhaps there were others in Mecca trained as highly as Ibn Naufal.

The presence of Christians in Mecca is also corroborated by the *Book of Idols*. Even though that the *Kitab al-Asman* dates to the ninth century, it details, from a Muslim perspective, the religious practices of pre-Islamic Arabia. One entry details the construction of the great Christian church in Sana (modern Yemen) by King Abraha al-Ashram (c. 525-553). According to the Kitab al-Asnam, "Abraha had built in Sana a church which he called al-Qalis. He built it of marble and employed in the construction the best of gild and wood…he wrote to the king of Abyssinia saying 'I have built to you a church the like of which no one has ever built. I shall not let the Arabs alone until I divert their pilgrimage away from that house[26]

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bountifully;" Galatians 6:8: "For a person will reap only what he sows;" and Matthew 7:16: "By their fruits you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?"

[26] Nabih Amin Faris, *The Book of Idols Being a Translation From the Arabic of the Kitab al-Asnam by Hisham Ibn al-Kalbi* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1952). This refers to the Ka'bah in Mecca.

to which they go and turn its course to this church.'"[27] But if, as Islamic historians declare, Mecca was a thriving pagan metropolis in the pre-Islamic era, why would Abraha insist that non-Christians visit his church?

One possible answer is that Mecca had more Christians than what is generally perceived and that they had no available places of worship. In this case, they would have been encouraged to visit the great church in Sana. The Arabs whom the king wanted to divert could have included any number of sectarian groups in Mecca in addition to the local Arab-Christian population.

It can also be argued that Abraha was intent on inviting certain types of Christians to his church. He himself was an Ethiopian of the Monophysite persuasion, so perhaps Mecca had a large enough Monophysite population of Christians that Abraha expected their presence at his church.

A third reason is that perhaps Abraha thought that certain Arabs would be easily swayed to switch religious allegiances. Perhaps inviting Arabs to his church was a manner in which he could earn the loyalty and the financial backing of specific well-to-do members of the Arab merchant

[27] Faris, *Kitab*, Al-Qalis. This particular edition of the *Kitab* has sometimes subject headings instead of page numbers or chapters.

class. Although King Abraha failed in his bid to rule solely Arabia, he remains an important Christian ruler on the eve of Islam.[28]

Critics of the Qur'an and Muhammad

The Qur'an contains many verses that argue against claims that Muhammad had a teacher or that he had somehow learned things that became the foundation of his revelations. Muhammad himself remained convinced that his message came directly from God, the same divine source which had inspired the prophets who came before him. Because of the spiritual connection he felt with earlier prophets and because of his own revelations, "Muhammad was absolutely convinced of the identity of the messages of the prophets. All Scriptures stem from and are part of a single Source, the Heavenly Archetype called the 'Mother of Books'

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[28] The standard date for Muhammad's birth is 570, forty years before his first revelation c.610. Sura 105, *The Elephant*, is used most often to determine that date of Muhammad's birth and is believed to mention the failed military expedition by King Abraha against Mecca in 570. In the military history of the Byzantine historian Procopius it is stated that Abraha had completed his military excursions by the date in which Procopius was writing and that was in 545. Another source is the Murayghan inscription which indicates that a major portion of Abraha's army had defeated a major group of Arab forces from the Hejaz near Mecca around the year 554. The expedition of 570, the year of the Elephant and Muhammad's birth, could be understood as a later Islamic invention to link the Prophet's birth with a failed Christian expedition. For this discussion, see Lawrence Conrad, "Abraha and Muhammad: Some Observations Apropos of Chronology and Literary "topoi" in the Early Arabic Historical Tradition," *BSOAS* 50, no. 2, (1987):227. For an updated look at Abraha's political role, see also G.W. Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 111-118.

and also the ‘Hidden Book.’”[29] This conviction did not prevent suspicions, however, from arising among Muhammad’s initial audience regarding his claims of revelation.

Certain Qur’anic verses deny that Muhammad was a possessed poet and that he had a human instructor. Sura 16:101-103 reads: “And when We change one communication for another communication, and God knows best what He reveals, they say: You are only a forger. No! Most of them do not know...And certainly We know that they say only a mortal teaches him. The tongue of him whom they accuse is barbarous, and this is clear Arabic tongue.” A similar view is found in 21:5: “No! They say: Medleys of dreams; No! He has forged it; No! He is only a poet; so let him bring us a sign as former prophets were sent with.”

Zamakhshari’s (d.1144) Qur’an commentary offers a few explanations for Sura 16:103. One tradition holds that the foreigner in question was Ya’ish, a book collector who became a Muslim. Another tradition argues that the “mortal teacher” was Jabr, a Byzantine servant of a Muslim master.[30] Yet another tradition records that the Sura actually referred to two slaves named Jabr and Yasar, who were

[29] Rahman, 10.

[30] Zamakhshari, *Commentary on Sura 16:103,* cited in Helmut Gätje, *The Qur’an and Its Exegesis*, trans. Alford T. Welch (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1996), 77.

sword-makers in Mecca.[31] These two often read the Torah and the Gospels publicly while Muhammad listened. According to Zamakshari, however, it was Muhammad who taught the slaves Jabr and Yasr the context of his revelations.[32] Again, we do not know what type of Christianity Jabr followed, but his name is similar to the Ethiopic *gabru* meaning slave; this would make sense, for the Qur'an says the teacher spoke in a barbarous language.[33]

Sura 25:4-5 also suggests that Muhammad had a teacher and drew on that existing stories: "And those disbelieve who say: This is nothing but a lie which he has forged, and other people have helped him at it; so indeed they have done injustice and uttered a falsehood. And they say: The

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.; see *Life of Muhammad*, *A Deputation of Christians Accept Islam*, 260, Guillaume, 180.

[33] Another instance that details Muhammad's personal interaction with Christians is the account of the Christian delegation that visited him from Najran. The account is likely apocryphal because in the story, the chief advisor of the Christian delegation suddenly acknowledged the prophethood of Muhammad: "O Christians you know right well that Muhammad is a prophet sent and he has brought a decisive declaration about the nature of your master. You know too that a people has never invoked a curse on a prophet and seen its elders live and its youth grow up. If you do this you will be exterminated. But if you decide to adhere to your religion and to maintain your doctrine about your master, then take your leave of the man and go home. So they came to the apostle and told him that they had decided not to resort to cursing him and to leave him in his religion and return home. But they would like him to send a man he could trust to decide between them in certain matters in dispute among them;" *Life* of Muhammad, *A Deputation from the Christians of Najran*, 410, Guillaume, 277; for the Christian martyrs in Najran that are mentioned in Sura 85:4-10 see Irfan Shahid, "The Martyrs of Najran: New Documents" *Subsidia Hagioraphica*, no. 49 (Societe de Bollandistes, Brussels, 1971).

stories of the ancients--he has them written down--so these are read out to him in the morning and in the evening."

Verses 26:221-225 imply that Satans [Shaitans, or Shaitan in the Qur'an] possess poets, one of which Muhammad was accused of being: "Shall I inform you of him upon whom the Shaitans descend? They descend upon every lying, sinful one, they incline their ears, and most of them are liars. And as to the poets, those who go astray follow them." Verse 36:69 reaffirms that the Qur'an is not to be considered poetry: "And We have not taught him poetry, nor is it meant for him [Muhammad]; it is nothing but a reminder and a plain Qur'an."[34]

The same can be said for verses 52:29, 30, 33: "Therefore, continue to remind them, for by the grace of your Lord, you [Muhammad] are not a soothsayer, or a madman. Or do they say [of you]: A poet, for whom we await an evil accident of time? Or do they say: He has forged it. No! They do not believe." Like verses are found in 69:41-46:

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[34] Poets spoke for themselves, but Muhammad spoke for God through Gabriel. Some have argued that Muhammad used a type of poetic style when repeating his prophetic utterances while others argued against the idea. Tradition holds that Muhammad was illiterate, but this does not disqualify the notion that poetry was an oral skill that could be learned. In the Muslim tradition, however, Muhammad remained illiterate to preserve his clean and untainted state as an untouched human recipient of divine revelation. See also, Gätje, 60-63.

> And it is not the word of a poet; little is it that you believe; nor the word of a soothsayer; little is it that you mind. It is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds. And if he had fabricated against us some of the sayings, We would certainly have seized him by the right hand, then we would certainly have cut off his aorta.

The final verses are found in 81: 22, 25: "And your companion is not gone mad...Nor is it the word of the cursed Shaitan."[35]

The subject of these Qur'anic verses suggests that Muhammad's initial audience--which likely held some Jews and Christians--may have known or had suspected that he was familiar with already existing religious texts. Otherwise why would they accuse him of being a forger or one who was simply repeating ancient folktales?

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[35] Muslim sources reveal that even Muhammad's family suspected that he was demon possessed; some thought that he had had a stroke and wanted him out of their midst. Muhammad's first revelation caused enough distress that he immediately contemplated suicide: "I thought woe is me poet or possessed--never shall the Quraysh say this of me! I will go to the top of the mountain and throw myself down that I may kill myself and gain rest." See *Life of Muhammad*, *The Prophet's Mission*, 153, Guillaume, 106. The *Hadith* of Bukhari (d.c. 870) mentions similar material regarding Muhammad's visitor, Gabriel. Non-Muslims surrounding Muhammad called Gabriel Satan; Gabriel was understood to be the Holy Spirit; Muhammad's wife Aisha could not see Gabriel; Gabriel could not enter a house that had either a portrait or a dog; others saw Gabriel as someone they knew in the community; Gabriel was believed to be responsible for the massacre of a Jewish tribe; Gabriel also appeared as a common merchant to other Muslims. Muhammad was also allegedly bewitched for a year by a Jewish Rabbi and tricked into believing he was having intercourse with his wives, but in reality, he was not. For these accounts, see *Life of Muhammad*, *The Names of the Jewish Adversaries*, 352, Guillaume, 240; Life of Muhammad, *The Raid on Qurayza*, 685, Guillaume, 461; *Sahih al-Bukhari*, 9 vols., trans. M. Khan (Chicago: Kazi Publications Inc., 1995), 2:21:225, 4:54:440, 4:54:450, 4:56:827, 5:59:448, and 8:73:174-175.

Initial Reactions to Muhammad

A select number of primary sources also reveal the possible characteristics of some of Muhammad's initial followers. These sources also describe his travels within Jewish and Christian communities. These sources, it must be noted, were written primarily by Christians, so their tone and description of the events they described must be read in this context.

Stephen of Alexandria, d.c.630

In the *Horoscope* of Stephen, an Arab merchant is said to have told Stephen of happenings in his homeland that involved Muhammad:

> In the desert of Ethrib (Yathrib, i.e. Medina) there had appeared a certain man from the so-called tribe of Quraysh of the genealogy of Ishmael, whose name was Muhammad and who said he was a prophet. He appeared in the month of Pharmuti, which is called April by the Romans, of the 932nd year from the beginning of Philip.[36] He has brought a new expression and a strange teaching, promising to those who accept him victories in wars, domination over enemies and delights in paradise.[37]

It remains uncertain exactly what Stephen meant when he said that Muhammad *appeared* in 620; it may be that this was the year his source first heard of or encountered Muhammad. This source revealed such a core of later Muslim beliefs

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[36] This corresponds to the year 620.

[37] *De Stephano Alexandrino, Horoscope,* 21, ed., Hermann Usener (Bonn: 1880).

that the author may have been reporting events that had recently transpired.[38]

The Doctrina Jacobi, c.634

Jacob, a Jew forcibly baptized, wrote to fellow baptized Jews to convince them of the truth he found in Christianity. Jacob's cousin, Justus, informed him of current events that involved an Arab prophet. Justus had heard the story from his brother Abraham who lived in Caesarea:

> And they were saying that the prophet had appeared, coming with the Saracens, and that he was proclaiming the advent of the anointed one, the Christ who was to come. I, having arrived at Sykamina, stopped by a certain old man well-versed in the scriptures, and I said to him: 'What can you tell me about the prophet who has appeared with the Saracens?' He replied, groaning deeply: 'He is false, for the prophets do not come armed with a sword. Truly they are works of anarchy being committed today, and I fear that the first Christ to come, whom the Christians worship, was the one sent by God and we instead are preparing for the Antichrist...But you go, master Abraham, and find out about the prophet who has appeared.' So I, Abraham, inquired and heard from those who had met him that there was no truth to be found in the so-called prophet, only the shedding of men's blood. He says also that he has the keys of paradise, which is incredible.[39]

The *Doctrina Jacobi* does not mention Muhammad by name but refers only to a prophet who came with the Saracens and proclaimed the coming of the Messiah, the Christ. From the

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[38] Robert G. Hoyland*, Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1997), 305.

[39] *Doctrina Jacobi*, trans. Vincent Deroche, in "Juifs et Chretiens dans L'Orient du Vlle siècle," *Travaux and Memoires* 11, vol.16 (1991), 209.

context of this report, however, perhaps the prophet saw himself as a Messianic figure and so too did his Saracen followers.[40] There is no mention of an associated holy book with this prophet, revelations, teachings, or teachers, and there is only one final reference to the *keys of paradise*. The author, Jacob, a former Jew, makes his negative view of this new movement clear by asserting that it was led by a false, violent Saracen prophet whom he considered to be the Antichrist.

[40] The idea that Islam originated as a Jewish Messianic movement is put forward by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook in their work *Hagarism*. This work stresses that perhaps the only accurate determining factor regarding the rise of Islam is in sources that are outside of the Muslim literary tradition. Using this approach, the authors argue that the early movement consisted of Jewish refugees from Palestine who joined with other Jewish tribes in Arabia with the plan to regain the Holy Land. However, this movement was short lived and became more Arabian in nature as the conquests grew and the movement became less and less Jewish. For these views see also, Patricia Crone, Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 4. Crone has written several influential books which include *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), which argues that Islam had its origins outside of Mecca. Instead, Crone suggests that the movement originated in northwest Arabia. Crone's *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); *God's Rule: Government and Islam: Six Centuries of Mediaeval Islamic Political Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); and *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) deal with the political aspects of early Islam and the debates over the legitimacy of rule in early Islam. Robert Hoyland is influenced by *Hagarism* (*Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*), as is David Cook in *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2002). Although influential, Hagarism has been met with criticism. For some critical views, see Josef van Ess, "The Making of Islam," *Times Literary Supplement*, Sep. 8, 1978: 998, who sees the arguments as a rehashing of known evidence. Even Crone's mentor, John Wansbrough, expresses reservations regarding the authenticity of some of the sources used in *Hagarism*. See John also, Wansbrough "Review," *BSOAS* 41, no. 1. (1978): 155-156.

Bishop Sebeos, c.660s

Sebeos, a bishop in Armenia, recorded many important events of the seventh century, using a number of available histories and chronicles, and left a detailed account of the Arab conquests of the early seventh century. Never throughout his account does he use the term Muslims; rather, he employs the terms Hagarenes, Arabs, and Ishmaelites.

Sebeos provides details on Muhammad's message and refers to some of the laws he instituted. He writes that Arabs were "awakened" by Jewish refugees and that a merchant named Muhammad brought to the Arabs the knowledge of the God that had been revealed to their father, Abraham. In addition:

> Muhammad preached saying: 'With an oath God promised that land to Abraham and his posterity... Now you, you are the sons of Abraham, and God will realize in you the promise made to Abraham and his posterity. Only love the God of Abraham, and go and take possession of your country which God gave to your father Abraham, and none will be able to resist you in battle, for God is with you. [41]

It can be argued that Sebeos included among these "sons of Abraham" Ishmaelites, Saracens, and even Jews or Christians who saw themselves as descendants of Abraham. Sebeos also reveals some of the laws that Muhammad gave to his followers: "He legislated for them not to eat carrion, not

[41] Sebeos, *The Armenian History Attributed To Sebeos Part* I, trans. R. W. Thomson (Liverpool: University Press, 1999), 95-96.

to drink wine, not to speak falsely, and not to commit fornication."[42] This again reflects Sozomen's claim that many Saracens and Ishmaelites followed certain laws of the Jews.[43] If this is true, Muhammad rallied his followers under laws and customs they already practiced or with which they were familiar. Although these laws are found in the Qur'an, Sebeos makes no reference to Muhammad's possessing a scripture which held these laws or to him having had a teacher. He does, however, refer to the "horrible invasions of the Ishmaelites" and to their leader as "the great ally of the Antichrist."[44]

A Chronicler of Khuzistan, c.660s

In this anonymous account a Nestorian chronicler identifies Muhammad's followers as the "sons of Ishmael." This may refer to Arabs who identified themselves as Ishmaelites and practiced some tenets of the Jewish faith, as told by Sozomen:[45]

> Then God raised up against them the sons of Ishmael, numerous as the sand on the sea shore, whose leader was Muhammad. Neither walls nor gates, nor armor or shield, withstood them, and they gained control over the entire land of the Persians...They also came to Byzantine territory, plundering and ravaging the entire region of Syria. Heraclius, the Byzantine king,

[42] Ibid.
[43] Sozomen, *HE*, 6:38:10-14, in *NPNF*, 2:375.
[44] Sebeos Bishop of Bagratunis, in *Historie d'Heraclius,* trans. F. Macler (Paris: 1904), 179-201.
[45] See note 35 above.

sent armies against them, but the Arabs killed more than 100,000 of them.[46]

Jacob of Edessa, d.c.708

Jacob wrote extensively on Syriac Christian history and liturgy and often used a question-and-answer literary style. The verses that mention Muhammad are few but very informative. According to Jacob, Muhammad traveled and traded in the lands of Palestine, Arabia, and Syrian Phoenicia.[47] Jacob dates Muhammad's initial raids in

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[46] *Chronicle of Khuzistan*, Ignazio Guidi, trans. and ed., *Chronicon Anonymum* in *CSCO* 1-2 (Paris, 1903), 30-31. Perhaps the most noteworthy section of this chronicle mentions the sanctuary at Mecca: "Regarding the dome of Abraham, we have been unable to discover what it is...Since he lived in tents, he built that place for the worship of God and for offering sacrifices...Indeed, it was no new thing for the Arabs to worship there, but goes back to antiquity, to their early days, in that they show honor to the father of the head of their people;" Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 187. In addition, the *Book of Idols* lists two separate Ka'bah outside of Mecca, but later Muslim historians drew the connection to the Meccan shrine because of its ties to Abrahamic monotheism, which Muhammad was revitalizing. These included a Ka'bah in Najran and another in Sindad, located in the region between al-Kufah and al-Basrah, in what is now southern Iraq. One is described as a "celebrated edifice" and the other as a type of tribal meeting hall. See also, Brian Doe, *Southern Arabia* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1971), 67-68; and Hisham Ibn Al-Kalbi, *The Book of Idols, Being a Translation From the Arabic of the Kitab al-Asnam by Hisham Ibn al-Kalbi*, trans. Nabih Amin Faris (New Jersey: Princeton, 1952). Ibn al-Kalbi, the author of the *Kitab*, was himself from al-Kufah, so that may be a reason why he does not equate his home with a pagan shrine of pre-Muslim worship. Later Muslim literature on Mecca came under revisionist history that had to tie the Qur'an and Abraham to the city that was distinctly Arab. For this view see F.E. Peters, *Mecca: A Literary History of the Muslim Holy Land* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 18-20. See Johnston, 398-402 for an updated analysis on the rise of Mecca.

[47] Jacob of Edessa, *Fragments of the Charts of James (Jacob) of Edessa*, in *The Seventh Century In The West-Syrian Chronicles Including Two Seventh-Century Syriac Apocalyptic Texts,* trans. A. Palmer (Liverpool: University Press, 1993), 39. Note that the translated texts also identify Jacob as James; for Muhammad's possible letters to Heraclius, see Nadia Maria El-Cheikh, "Muhammad and Heraclius: A Study in Legitimacy," *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999):5-21.

Palestine which began when Heraclius, the Byzantine Emperor, was in his eleventh year (620-621).[48]

Theodore Bar Koni (Eighth Century)

Writing in the early 700s, Theodore Bar Koni comments regarding Muhammad's revelations and teachings: "And if you say it is from God, then where has this God who has taught this been, to be misunderstood for more than six hundred years after Christ appeared?"[49] Theodore was also the first to suggest that Muhammad had a teacher: "If all that you have said is true, why at a certain time did a teacher arise from among yourselves and denounce it all?"[50] This seems to imply either that some teacher had denounced Muhammad's teachings or that a follower of Muhammad perceived inconsistencies within his message and left the movement.[51] Another possible explanation regarding the teacher who "denounced it all" is the aforementioned accounts in which Muhammad was said to have met and have been instructed by the monk Bahira.[52]

Theodore also suggests that Muhammad's early followers relied on a collection of scripture-based narratives, for

[48] Ibid., 37.

[49] Theodorus Bar Koni, in *CSCO* 55, 246.

[50] Ibid., 282.

[51] Samir K. Samir, *The Prophet Muhammad as seen by Timothy I and other Arab Christian Authors* in *Syrian Christians Under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, David Thomas, ed., (Boston: Brill, 2001), 77.

[52] See above chapter 3, note 72.

he writes “against those who while professing to accept the Old Testament, and acknowledging the coming of Christ our Lord, are nevertheless far removed from both of them, and now they demand from us an apology for our faith, not from all of the scriptures, but only from those which they acknowledge.”[53] Theodore proposes, then, that Muslims were forcing the local Christians to express their faith in terms of accordance with the Muslim scriptures. This may well have been the Qur’an, but it may also refer to a collection of texts that included certain Jesus narratives paralleled in what became the Qur’an.

A Monk of Beth Hale and an Arab Notable, c.717

Attributed to Abraham of Beth Hale, this work uses a question-and-answer format to describe a meeting between a monk and an Arab who debated over the Bible and the Qur’an. Within the dialogue, the Arab eventually confesses the truth of Christianity and even admits that many others would convert if it were not for fear of the Muslim authorities and social embarrassment. In the entire text the Arab only asks questions, and the monk provides definitive answers. Since the Arab eventually accepts Christianity, this work could well be a clever piece of

[53] Theodorus Bar Koni, *Liber Scholiorum,* trans. A. Scher, in *CSCO* 69 (Paris: 1912), 231.

Christian propaganda that was used as a reference tool in interfaith dialogues.

This may be the first text that identifies the monk Bahira as Muhammad's teacher.[54] This mention of Bahira predates by over a century the earliest extant Muslim sources that name Bahira; the Christian sources were the first to mention him by name. In the exchange between the monk and the Arab, the monk tells the Arab that Muhammad received the knowledge of the one true God from Sargis Bahira.[55] As mentioned above, this particular story was reworked in Muslim literature to demonstrate that even a Christian monk recognized Muhammad as a prophet.[56] In contrast, the Christian literature--specifically the *Bahira Legend*--emphasizes that Bahira was the original channel for Muhammad's revelations. Even though the Beth Hale account

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[54] Drijvers, 401-402. There is also a series of short Greek and Syrian chronologies that include mention of Muhammad which date to the early decades of the 700s. There are two brief references to Muhammad: "Mhmt [Muhammad] came upon the earth in 932 [AD 620-621] of Alexander, son of Philip the Macedonian, then he reigned seven years." It is not clear if this refers to Muhammad's birth, his first revelation or simply when he became known to the chronicler. If this refers to the number of years he was in control after he took Mecca in 630 then that would place his death in 637; if his birth, then history should be rewritten. If it refers to his death, then history needs some further adjustment. The second chronology reference has the heading *AD ANUM 724* and mentions that after Muhammad entered Mecca in 630 he lived for ten more years. Again this is somewhat confusing for this implies he lived until about 640, which is well beyond his accepted lifespan; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 394.

[55] See Sidney Griffith, "Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Beth Hale and a Muslim Emir," *Hugoye* (Journal of Syriac Studies) 3.1 (January 2000):29-54.

[56] See above chapter 3.

was written after Muhammad's death, it does clearly fall into the literature that involved the interaction between monks and Arabs, Christians that Muhammad knew, and certain Qur'anic passages that mention Muhammad had a teacher of some sort.

John of Damascus (Eighth Century)

One of the better known critics of Muhammad was John of Damascus, who wrote in the 730s. Having probably served the Muslim caliph, John became a monk at Mar Sabas in Jerusalem, where he wrote several works on doctrine and against iconoclasm.

John writes of the "Ishmaelites:"

> From that time until now a false prophet appeared among them, surnamed Muhammad, who, having happened upon the Old and New Testament and apparently having conversed, in like manner, with an Arian monk, put together his own heresy. And after ingratiating himself with the people by pretense of piety, he spread rumors of a scripture brought down to him from heaven. So, having drafted some ludicrous doctrines in his book, he handed over to them this form of worship.[57]

In John's opinion, then, Muhammad's interaction with Christian monks had not been a simple case of an Arab merchant who was interested in asceticism or monotheism. Instead, Muhammad had formulated his own doctrines after he had familiarized himself with the Bible and had met with an

[57] John of Damascus, *ΠΕΡΙ ΑΙΡΕΣΕΩΝ,* in *PG*, 94 (Paris: J.P. Migne, ed., 1857-1866), col.111.

Arian monk. John's grandfather, Mansur ibn Sargun, had probably been in charge of Damascus when the Arabs took the city in 635,[58] which could be the grounds for John's negative analysis of Muhammad.

After listing one hundred heresies, John lists Islam as number one-hundred and one.[59] It was listed as a **σκεία**, which means *shade*, *shadow* or *darkness*. It is also related to the term **θρησκεία**, which means *religion* or *religious practice*, so John may have considered Islam as a *misleading* religion that was separate from Christianity.[60] John also considers Islam to be a warning sign for the coming of the Anti-Christ[61] because he applies the term to anyone who did not accept the dual natures of Jesus as perfect man and perfect God.[62] So, by this definition, it was the religion of Islam itself and not Muhammad which John considered as the harbinger of the Anti-Christ.

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[58] Mansur ibn Sargun may have been the bishop, or the friend of the bishop, who was described as the one who negotiated with Khalid ibn Walid, the leader of the Muslim forces. Eutychius, *Annales*, II, in *CSCO*, LI (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1954), 15. There is also an account which describes that the Muslim forces returned to Damascus to complete a series of sieges. The bishop of the city first offered gifts to Khalid to spare the city, but he eventually capitulated to the Muslim forces; see Al-Baladhuri, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, trans. Philip Hitti (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916), 172, 186-187.

[59] John lists one hundred heresies in his *On Heresies* and adds the *The Ishmaelites* as number one-hundred-one; see John of Damascus, *On Heresies*, Chase, 111-153.

[60] John of Damascus, ***ΠΕΡΙ ΑΙΡΕΣΕΩΝ***, *PG* 94, col. 111.

[61] Ibid.

[62] John of Damascus, ***ΠΕΡΙ ΑΙΡΕΣΕΩΝ***, *PG* 94, col. 111-112; see Daniel Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The Heresy of the Ishmaelites* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 68-69.

Theophanes the Confessor, d.c.818

The account on Muhammad in the *Chronographia* is very detailed:

> In this year [632] died Muhammad, the leader and false prophet of the Saracens…At the beginning of his advent the misguided Jews thought he was the Messiah who is awaited by them, so that some of their leaders joined him and accepted his religion...Those who did so were ten in number, and they remained with him until his murder[63]...He was descended from a very very widespread tribe, that of Ishmael, son of Abraham…Being destitute and an orphan... Muhammad decided to enter the service of a rich Woman who was a relative of his, called Khadija, as a hired worker with a view to trading by camel in Palestine…Whenever he came to Palestine he consorted with Jews and Christians and sought from them certain scriptural matters. He was also afflicted with epilepsy. When his wife became aware of this of this, she was greatly distressed...He tried deceitfully to placate her by saying, "I keep seeing a vision of a certain angel called Gabriel, and being unable to bear his sight, I faint and fall down." Now, she had a certain monk living there, a friend of hers (who had been exiled for his depraved doctrine), and she related everything to him...Wishing to satisfy her, he said to her, "He has spoken the truth, for this is the angel who is sent to all the prophets." When she had heard the words of the false monk she was the first to believe in Muhammad.[64]

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[63] *The Life of Muhammad* describes how while praying in a cemetery one night, Muhammad was given the choice of having the keys to the treasuries of this world, or of meeting God at once in paradise; Muhammad chose the latter. See *Life of Muhammad*, *The Beginning of the Apostle's Illness*, 1000-1013, Guillaume, 678-683. Certain *Hadith*, however, suggest that Muhammad was poisoned by a Jewish woman and that he died from the effects of the poison: "Narrated Anas bin Malik: A Jewess brought a poisoned (cooked) sheep for the Prophet who ate from it. She was brought to the Prophet and he was asked, 'Shall we kill her?' He said, 'No.' I continued to see the effect of the poison on the palate of the mouth of Allah's Apostle." Sahih Bukhari 3:47:786. "Narrated 'Aisha: The Prophet in his ailment in which he died, used to say, 'O Aisha! I still feel the pain caused by the food I ate at Khaibar, and at this time, I feel as if my aorta is being cut from that poison.'" Sahih Bukhari, 5:59:713.

[64] Theophanes, *Chronographia*, *AM* (Anni Mundi) 6122, 333-334, in *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor: Byzantine and Near East History AD 284-813*, trans. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press,1997), 464-465.

There are several important details to take from this account in the *Chronographia*. Theophanes states that it was a group of ten Jews who followed Muhammad and believed he was the awaited Messiah. This passage reflects the account in the *Doctrina Jacobi*, which states that Muhammad "was proclaiming the advent of the anointed one, the Christ who was to come."

Conclusions on Initial Reactions

Theophanes states above in the *Chronographia* that Muhammad, whom he considered to be a Saracen prophet, was descended from the widespread tribe of Ishmael. We know from Sozomen[65] that many Saracens lived their lives according to Jewish precepts and that some converted even to Christianity. Referring to the *Chronographia* and the *Life of Muhammad*, it can be argued that Muhammad's ten followers were Saracens who had converted to Judaism and followed the "Prophet of the Saracens." The *Life* suggests that these ten followers consisted of pagans and Jews who had become Muslims to save their lives.[66] Further passages in the *Life* propose that the ten were a group of Jews who became Muslims after they had left their Jewish leader, Abu

[65] See above note 35.
[66] *The Life of Muhammad*, *The Names of the Jewish Adversaries*, 351, Guillaume, 239.

Amir, who had been an ascetic and who was called "the monk."[67] Perhaps some of the ten were formerly Christian as well. In addition to his *Lives of the Monks of Syria*, Theodoret leaves a positive impression of his Ishmaelite neighbors. This may help in identifying the religious approach of some of Muhammad's Ishmaelite followers. Theodoret states in his *Cure of Pagan Maladies*:

> As to our nomadic neighbors--by this I say the Ishmaelites who are living in the deserts but who are not versed in Greek letters--they possess an intelligence, shrewd and strong, and they have the ability to discern between what is truth and falsehood.[68]

This passage indicates that the Saracens, Ishmaelites, and Arabs who came into contact with Christian monks were not unintelligent. They may not have known Greek, but they remained attentive to their interaction with these desert ascetics and revered them and their strong faith. Thus, the Ishmaelites mentioned in the accounts by Sozomen, Sebeos, and the Chronicler of Khuzistan may fall into such a classification.[69]

Theophanes also upholds this account in the *Life of Muhammad*, which states that Muhammad was employed by

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[67] *The Life of Muhammad,* Some Account of the Hypocrites, 411, Guillaume, 278.

[68] Theodoret, *Graecarum Affectionum Curatio*, *PG* 83, J.P. Migne, ed. (Paris: 1864): col. 949.

[69] Theodoret classifies Arabs and Saracens as the same group and states that the Hagarenes were a branch of the Ishmaelites. See also, Theodoret, *Commentary on Isaiah*, *PG* 81, J. P. Migne, ed., (Paris: 1864): col. 1533.

Khadija and traded her goods throughout Syria-Palestine.[70] In the *Chronographia* Muhammad is said to have had met with Jews and Christians during these travels and pursued direction from them regarding scriptural matters.

Two passages in the *Chronographia*, however, could be polemical additions by Theophanes. One is the assertion that Muhammad's angelic visions were caused by epilepsy, and the other is the identification of Khadija's monk-friend as an exiled false monk. The reference to epilepsy may have been Theophanes' way of discounting or explaining the method by which Muhammad was said to have received his revelations.[71] The reference to the monk must refer to Waraqa ibn Naufal, who is mentioned in the *Life of Muhammad*. Theophanes, however, saw this man as a false monk because he is said to have validated Muhammad's revelation.

[70] *The Life of Muhammad*, *The Apostle of God Marries Khadija*, 120, Guillaume, 82.

[71] Muhammad is said to have received his first revelation while he was asleep, but he attempted suicide when he awoke because he did want to be considered by the Quraysh as a poet. See also, *Life of Muhammad*, *The Prophet's Mission*, 152-153, Guillaume, 106.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation has been to identify which texts and religious communities may have influenced Muhammad's understanding of Jesus. The evidence presented suggests that Muhammad was familiar indeed with the traditions of a non-Biblical Jesus. The circumstances of Muhammad's spiritual development were shaped by the religious environments and characters that surrounded him. The most findings that most strongly support this view are the Jesus parallels that are found between non-Biblical texts and the Qur'an.

The most difficult aspect of this research was to examine the primary sources and to single out those groups and texts that have specific likenesses with the Jesus found in the Qur'an. The *Panarion* by Epiphanius of Salamis presents these specifics. The *Panarion* contains a number of groups, their founders, and texts, which can be identified as possible sources for the Qur'anic Jesus.

These results, however, are not limited to the *Panarion*. Muhammad himself was virtually surrounded by Christian ascetics during his caravan expeditions. Exposure

to these ascetics and their practices enabled him to pursue the holy in a like manner. As a result, Muhammad in Muslim literature is portrayed with ascetic qualities that resemble those of the Christian monks who came before him.

The various groups in and near Arabia were more than simple “God-seekers” or “Believers.” These groups consisted of Jews who had accepted Christ as the Messiah but not as the Son of God and Saracens and Ishmaelites who were partly Jewish and Christian in belief or practice. Each of these groups could accept Jesus as a miracle worker.

An equally challenging task was to distinguish the adherents of such groups from those who were possibly Muhammad’s initial followers. This challenge is best addressed by consulting the *Life of Muhammad* and the primary sources that addressed the initial movement that appeared in Muhammad’s name. A group of followers who consisted of Saracens who had converted to Judaism, or to Christianity, corresponds well with a group or groups who would have been familiar with stories regarding a non-Biblical Jesus.

The possibility that Muhammad had an instructor who was a source of his religious knowledge is not a welcome idea in the Muslim world. But if this were in fact true, it

need not detract from his subsequent revelations. It would, in fact, only confirm his quest for spiritual direction.

The apocryphal tales of a young, child Jesus fill a Biblical gap regarding his formative years. Muhammad's direct religious experience transformed such stories. They were believed to have been divinely revealed, and from unwritten sources, and in Arabic. This separates the Qur'anic Jesus from previous scriptures, which were believed to be foreign, in error, and antiquated. This is supported by Sura 2:106: "Whatever communications we abrogate or cause to be forgotten, we bring one better than it or like it." Thus, existing traditions about Jesus were considered not new necessarily, but reaffirmed as accurate.

The Qur'an may even allude to the existence of other texts that exhibit similarities to certain Qur'anic passages. Sura 10:37-38 states:

> And this Qur'an is not such [a book] as could be forged by those besides God, but it is a verification of that which is before it and a clear explanation of the book, there is no doubt in it, from the Lord of the worlds. Or do they say: He [Muhammad] has forged it? Say; [to them] then bring a chapter like this [chapter in the Qur'an] and invite whom you can besides God, [to prove it] if you are truthful.

In addition, Sura 2:111 states: "And they say: none shall enter the garden [of paradise] except he who is a Jew or a Christian. These are their vain desires. Say: [to them]

bring your proof [texts] if you are truthful.” Likewise, Sura 5:68 states: “Say: O followers of the Book! You follow no good till you keep the Taurat [the Torah] and the Injeel [the gospel] and that which is revealed to you from your Lord.”

One point that this dissertation has not addressed is the chronological order of Suras in the Qur’an. This is a separate task that would require a solid examination of the text to assist in clarifying the arrangement of the Jesus verses.

The Qur’an to Muslims is considered the totality of revealed scriptures, and this includes all scriptural based stories regarding Jesus. The Qur’an needed Jesus narratives that were not in the Bible but that were familiar enough among groups who might be receptive to Muhammad’s universal message.

Sura 3:49 mentions that Jesus cured the blind and the leprous and raised the dead but there are no specific narrations of these stories in the Qur’an. The Jesus in the Qur’an, then, is quite different from the Jesus of the Bible. There is no feeding the five thousand, no walking on water, no parables, no Last Supper, no death on the cross or resurrection and no ascension into heaven. Instead, in the Qur’an, Jesus makes a spring appear under a tree after

his birth, talks in the cradle as an infant, and brings clay birds to life. The Jesus in the Qur'an is rescued by God from a death on the cross.

The Qur'an itself is perhaps the most compelling piece of evidence that specifies the existence and influence of surrounding sects. Sura 6:159 states: "Surely they who divided their religion into parts and became sects, you have no concern with them; their affair is only with God, and then He will inform them of what they did."

The conclusion, then, is that the Jesus found in the Qur'an is nearly identical to the Jesus in non-Biblical texts that existed before Muhammad received his revelations. Therefore, the idea that the stories from the Qur'an involving Jesus are original seventh-century productions should perhaps be reconsidered.

APPENDIX

JESUS PASSAGES IN THE QUR'AN

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The following is a list, in order, of the Suras that mention Jesus.

> [2:87] We gave Moses the Book and followed him up with a succession of messengers; We gave Jesus the son of Mary clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. Why is it that whenever there comes to you a messenger with what you yourselves desire not, you are puffed up with pride? Some you called impostors, and others you slay.
>
> [2:136] Say you: "We believe in God, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: And we bow to God.
>
> [2:253] Those messengers We endowed with gifts, some above others: To one of them God spoke; others He raised to high degrees; to Jesus the son of Mary We gave clear Signs, and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit.
>
> [3:45-59] Behold! The angels said: "O Mary! God gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honor in this world and the Hereafter and of [the company of] those nearest to God; 46. And he shall speak to the people when in the cradle and when of old age and he shall be one of the good ones.47. She said: My Lord when shall there be a son born to me and a man has not touched me? He said: even so God creates what He pleases, when He has decreed a matter He only says to it Be and it is. 48. And He will teach him the book and the wisdom and the *Tavrat* [Torah] and the *Injeel* [Gospel]. 49. And make him an apostle to the children of Israel: [Jesus will say] That I have come to you with a sign from your Lord that I determine for you out of dust like the form of a bird then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with God's permission and I heal the blind and the leprous and bring the dead to life with God's permission and I inform you of what you should eat and what you should store in your houses; most surely there is a sign in this for you if you are believers

51. Surely God is my Lord and your Lord; therefore serve Him, this is the right path.

[3:52] When Jesus found unbelief on their part he said: Who will be my helpers for God? The disciples answered: We are God's helpers: We believe in God, and do bear witness that we are ones who submit.

[3:55] Behold! God said: "O Jesus! I am going to terminate the period of your stay on earth and cause you to ascend to Myself and purify you of those who disbelieve and I will make those who follow you superior to those who disbelieve to the Day of Resurrection: then you shall return to Me so I will decide between you concerning that in which you differed.

[3:59] The similitude of Jesus before God is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him: Be! And he was.

[3:84] Say: 'We believe in God, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in the Books given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets, from their Lord: We make no distinction between one and another among them, and to God do we bow our will.

[4:157] And [for] their saying, 'Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of God.' And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him [Jesus] to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain. 158. No! God raised him [Jesus] up to himself and God is mighty and wise.

[4:163] We have sent you inspiration, as we sent it to Noah and the Messengers after him: we sent inspiration to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms.

[4:171] O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say lies about God but speak the truth. The Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, was no more than a messenger of God, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in God and His messengers. Desist! Do not say three! It will be better for you for God is one God: Glory be to Him and He is above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And God is sufficient as a protector.

[5:17] Certainly they disbelieve who say: Surely, God he is the Messiah son of Mariam. Say: Who then could control anything as against God when He wished to destroy the Messiah son of Mariam and his mother and all those on the Earth.

[5:46] “And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him: a guidance and an admonition to those who fear God. 47. And the followers of the Gospel should have judged by what God revealed in it and whoever did not judge by what God revealed those are they that are the transgressors.

[5:72] Certainly they disbelieve who say: Surely, God, He Is the Messiah, son of Mariam.

[5:75] The Messiah son of Mariam is but an apostle and apostles before him have indeed passed away. And his mother was a truthful woman and they both used to eat food. See how we make the communication clear to them then behold how they are turned away.

[5:78] Curses were pronounced on those among the Children of Israel who rejected faith, by the tongue of David and of Jesus the son of Mary: because they disobeyed and persisted in excesses.

[5:110] Then will God say: O Jesus the son of Mary! Recount My favor to thee and to thy mother. Behold! I strengthened thee with the Holy Spirit so that you spoke to the people in childhood and in maturity. Behold! I taught you the Book and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel and behold! You make out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, by My leave, and you breathe into it and it becomes a bird by My leave, and you heal those born blind, and the lepers, by My leave. And behold! You bring forth the dead by My leave. And behold! I did restrain the Children of Israel from you when you showed them the clear signs and the unbelievers among them said: This is nothing but evident magic.

[5:112] Behold! The disciples, said: O Jesus the son of Mary! Can the Lord send down to us a table set with food from heaven? Jesus said: Fear God, if you have faith.

[5:114]Jesus the son of Mary said: O God our Lord! Send us from heaven a table set with food, that there may be for us - for the first and the last of us - a solemn festival and a sign from thee; and provide for our sustenance, for you are the best Sustainer.

[5:116] And behold! God will say: O Jesus the son of Mary! Did you say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods besides God? He will say: Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right to say. Had I said such a thing, You would indeed have known it. You know what is in my heart, though I know not what is in Yours. For You know in full all that is hidden.

[6:85] And Zakariya and John, and Jesus and Elias: are all in the ranks of the righteous.

[9:30] Christians say that the Messiah is the son of God.

[9:31] [Christians] They have taken their doctors of law and their monks for their lords besides God, and also the Messiah son of Mariam.

[19:27-34] "And she [Mary] came to her people with him, carrying him with her. They said O Mariam, surely you have done a strange thing. 28. O sister of Aaron, your father was not a bad neither man nor was your mother an unchaste woman. 29. But she pointed to him [Jesus]. They said: How should we speak to one who was a child in the cradle? 30. He said: Surely I am a servant of God, He has given me the book and made me a prophet; 31. And He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has enjoined on me salat and zakat[1] as long as I live. 32. And dutiful to my mother and he has not made me insolent, unblessed; 33. And peace be on me the day I was born, and on the day I die, and on the die I am raised to life. 34. Such is Isa son of Mariam; this is the saying of truth about which they dispute.

[23:50] And we made the son of Mariam and his mother a sign.

[33:7] And remember We took from the prophets their covenant: as We did from Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus the son of Mary: We took from them a solemn covenant.

[42:13] The same religion He has established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah - that which We have sent by inspiration to thee - and that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus: Namely, that you should remain steadfast in religion, and make no divisions therein: to those who worship other things than God, hard is the way to which you call them.

[43:57] When Jesus the son of Mary is held up as an example, behold, the people raise a clamor to him. 59.

[1] This refers to prayers and almsgiving.

He was nothing but a servant on whom We bestowed favor, and We made him an example for the children of Israel.

[43:63] When Jesus came with clear signs, he said: Now have I come to you with Wisdom, and in order to make clear to you some of the points on which you dispute; so be careful and do your duty to God and obey me. 64. Surely God is my Lord and your Lord, therefore serve Him; this is the right path.

[57:27] Then We made Our apostles to follow in their footsteps and We sent after them Jesus the son of Mary, and bestowed on him the Gospel; and We put in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and mercy. But the monasticism which they invented for themselves We did not prescribe for them. We commanded only seeking the pleasure of God, but they did not observe it properly, so We gave to those of them who believed their reward and most of them are transgressors.

[61:6] And remember, Jesus, the son of Mary, said: O Children of Israel! I am the messenger of God sent to you, confirming the Law which came before me, and giving Glad Tidings of a Messenger to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.[2] But when he came to them with clear signs, they said, This is evident sorcery!

[61:14] O you who believe! Be helpers of God: As said Jesus the son of Mary to the disciples, Who will be my helpers in the work of God? The disciples said, We are God's helpers! Then a portion of the Children of Israel believed, and a portion disbelieved. But We gave power to those who believed against their enemies, and they became the ones that prevailed.

[2] This is believed to be a variation of the name Muhammad.

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